Fall 2005

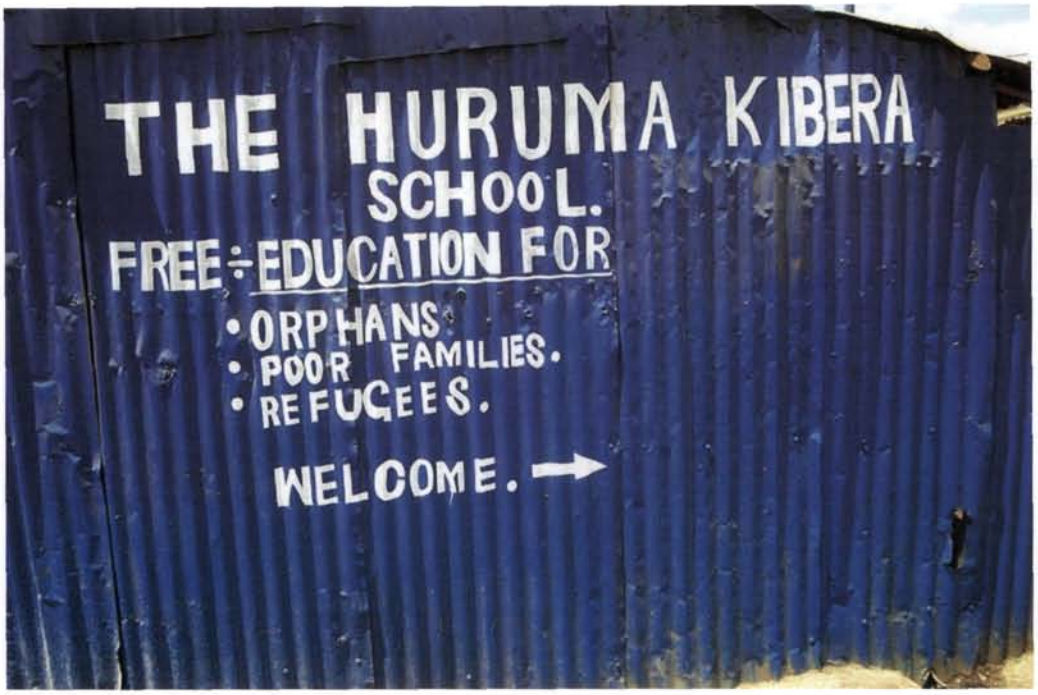
EDUCATION next

A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

Underground Education

Private schools in the world's worst slums

BY JAMES TOOLEY



IN THIS ISSUE:

Tribute to John Walton, New Research on Charters, A Conflict of Interest in Supplemental Services, The New Philanthropists, Debating the Bloomberg Revolution

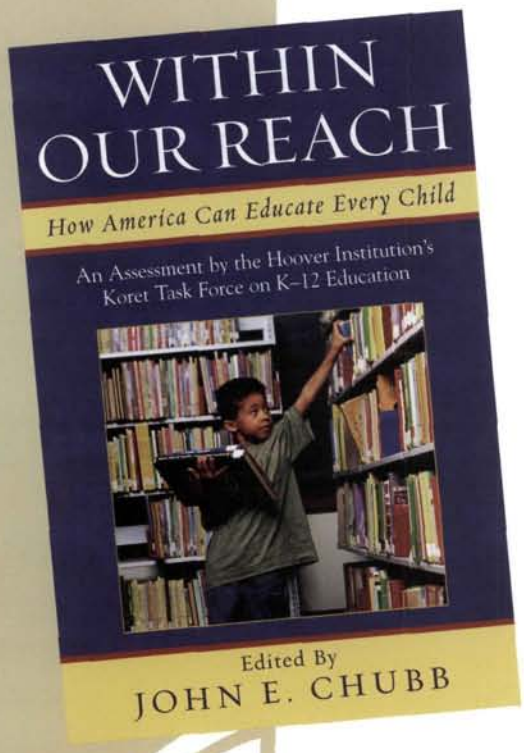
CONTRIBUTORS: SOL STERN, JOE WILLIAMS, ROBERT BIFULCO, RICHARD COLVIN, ERIC HANUSHEK, CAROLINE HOXBY, HELEN LADD, PAUL PETERSON, DAVID SKINNER

www.educationnext.org / $7.00

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Is the *No Child Left Behind* Act Working?

An urgent case for saving America's troubled schools.


WITHIN OUR REACH
How America Can Educate Every Child
An Assessment by the Hoover Institution's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education
Edited By
JOHN E. CHUBB

The No Child Left Behind Act is bolder than all previous federal education laws, **setting ambitious goals for universal student achievement** and authorizing severe remedies for schools not reaching them. In a nation where most youngsters are far from proficient in reading and mathematics and where innumerable efforts to boost learning levels have fallen short, NCLB makes a huge policy wager: that failing schools and school districts can be set right and that all children can master reading and math.

After three years, it's clear that NCLB is breaking plenty of education china—if not a new education path. Today, however, it seems **the law's implementation will fall far short of its potential**. NCLB *includes a series of compromises and accepts a number of constraints that will* prevent it from really working. Commonsense **modifications are needed**. Yet the most-needed changes are not the ones being bandied about in policy circles or offered up by interest groups on Capitol Hill.

In their new book, ***Within Our Reach: How America Can Educate Every Child***, the members of the Hoover Institution's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education undertake this crucial repair work. The book **presents a midterm assessment of NCLB that** closely examines its core elements and **offers recommendations for practical reforms to save the law** and strengthen some of its key principles—high standards, results-based accountability, parental options, and research-based practices.

2005, ca. 200 pages
ISBN: 0-7425-4888-0 $19.95 paper
ISBN: 0-7425-4887-2 $60.00 cloth

To Order...

call 800.462.6420 or
visit www.rowmanlittlefield.com

HOOVER INSTITUTION

. . . ideas defining a free society

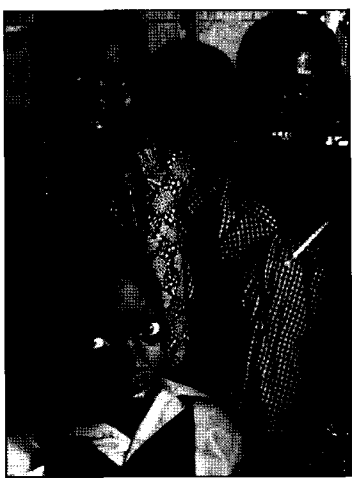
HOOVER INSTITUTION, Stanford University Toll-free: 877.466.8374 Fax: 650.723.1687 info@hoover.stanford.edu www.hoover.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

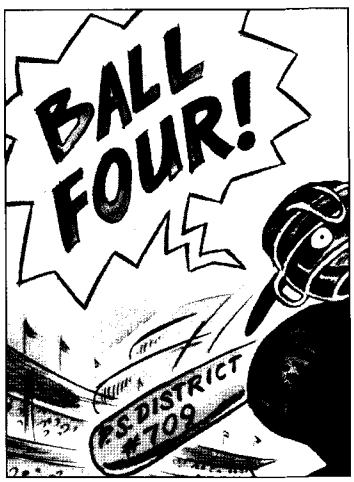
VOLUME 5, NUMBER 4

EDUCATION next

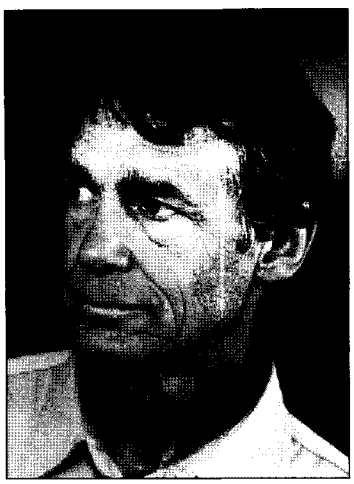
A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH



22



42



5

5 Tribute to John Walton

forum

11 An Education Mayor Takes Charge

The Picture in New York

A Negative Assessment by SOL STERN

On the Positive Side by JOE WILLIAMS

features

22 Private Schools for the Poor

Education where no one expects it by JAMES TOOLEY

34 The New Philanthropists

Can their millions enhance learning? by RICHARD LEE COLVIN

42 Making Up the Rules as You Play the Game

A conflict of interest at the very heart of NCLB by PAUL E. PETERSON

COVER PHOTO by *James Tooley*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

research

50 The Truths about Charter Schools

52 *Findings from the City of Big Shoulders*
by CAROLINE M. HOXBY and JONAH E. ROCKOFF

60 *Results from the Tar Heel State*
by ROBERT BIFULCO and HELEN F. LADD

check the facts

67 Pseudo-Science and a Sound Basic Education
Voodoo statistics in New York
CHECKED by ERIC A. HANUSHEK

whatever happened to...

74 Libertarian Liberals
When the left was (sometimes) right
by DAVID SKINNER

74

the legal beat

10 Shaky Ground
NEA sues over NCLB
by JOHN R. MUNICH and ROCCO E. TESTANI

from the editors

3 Looking in the Wrong Place
by MARCI KANSTOROOM

correspondence

6 *Educating principals; unflagging the SATs; charter schools; more Mel Levine; the inequity of adequacy*

book reviews

82 Does God Belong in Public Schools?
by KENT GREENAWALT

Between Memory and Vision: The Case for Faith-Based Schooling
by STEVEN C. VRYHOF REVIEWED by NATHAN GLAZER

84 Welcome to Lizard Motel: Children, Stories, and the Mystery of Making Things Up
by BARBARA FEINBERG REVIEWED by DIANE RAVITCH

86 Book Alert

school life

88 Broken on the Court
by IAN EARLE

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 4

EDUCATION next

A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

Editor-in-Chief	Paul E. Peterson
Senior Editor	Chester E. Finn Jr.
Executive Editors	Frederick M. Hess
	Marci Kanstoroom
Research Editor	Martin West
Managing Editor	Carol Peterson
Manuscript Editor	Peter Meyer
Design Director	Bruce Sanders
Graphics Editor	Mark Linnen
Consulting Editor	Jay P. Greene
Editorial Staff	Susan Pasternack, Deborah Styles
Design Production	Robin Cheung
Web Editor	Bridgitt Ahern
Circulation	Jennifer Presley
Editorial Board	John E. Chubb, Williamson Evers, Eric A. Hanushek, Paul Hill, E. D. Hirsch Jr., Caroline M. Hoxby, Terry M. Moe, Diane Ravitch, Herbert Walberg

Publisher	Hoover Institution, Leland Stanford Junior University
Additional Sponsoring Institutions	Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University Thomas B. Fordham Foundation Manhattan Institute for Policy Research

Subscriptions One-year subscription (four issues), $20 in the United States; $30 in Canada; $40 elsewhere. To subscribe or to submit change of address information, call us at (800) 935-2882; fax us at (650) 723-8626; visit us at www.educationnext.org; or email us at hooverpress@hoover.stanford.edu. You may also write to *Education Next* Subscriptions, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6010. Cover price is $7/issue. ISSN 1539-9672.

Advertising For information on advertising, please contact Advertising Manager, Program on Education Policy and Governance, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138, (617) 495-6954.

Letters We welcome letters about our contents. Longer versions of some letters may be found at www.educationnext.org. Write to Letters to the Editor, *Education Next*, 226 Littauer North Yard, 1875 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02138; fax to (617) 496-1507; or email Editor_EM@latte.harvard.edu.

Editorial Queries We consider unsolicited contributions. Send manuscript submissions as email attachments to Editor_EM@latte.harvard.edu. Pieces sent by regular mail go to Carol Peterson, *Education Next*, 226 Littauer North Yard, 1875 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02138.

Opinions expressed in *Education Next* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board of *Education Next*, the Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University, or the sponsors of *Education Next*.

Visit us at http://www.educationnext.org, where unabridged essays can be found.

© by the Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University, 2005

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Looking in the Wrong Place

The Flaw in the New Federal Charter School Study

As the proverbial story goes, a drunk, when asked where he had lost his keys, pointed off in the darkness, far from the lamppost under which he was searching. "But the light's better here," he explained.

So it is with the new federal study of charter schools. That study plans to look at 50 middle schools (and, perhaps, some older students at elementary schools), despite the fact that, according to our estimates based on data from the Center for Education Reform, only about 20% of the country's 3,400 charter schools are middle schools or have a middle school plus high school design; the rest serve students beginning in kindergarten or 9th grade. Even worse, two studies presented in this issue of *Education Next* appear to confirm what intuition suggests: charter schools are most effective for students who enter at an early age.

It's cheaper to look at middle-school kids, says the federal contractor, Mathematica Policy Research (MPR). By focusing on middle school, one can simply use the statewide data on a child's performance on tests for students in grades 3 through 8, as mandated by No Child Left Behind. For a solid study of elementary schools, MPR would have to administer its own tests.

In other words, the middle schools are where the cheap light is. Never mind that most kids are elsewhere.

Of course, no single study will ever tell us about all charter schools, because charters are inherently diverse. It no longer seems odd to encounter under the same moniker military schools and peace schools, schools for dancers and schools for those who have broken the law, boarding schools and schools that exist only in cyberspace. Indeed, that was the original intention: to free schools from suffocating regulation and give parents choices.

So it is ironic that the media treat charters as identical as they zero in on one overriding question: do students attending them learn more than students attending traditional public schools?

The issue is becoming all-consuming. Beginning with the *New York Times*'s front-page splash about an American Federation of Teachers (AFT) study in August of 2004 ("Nation's Charter Schools Lagging Behind, U.S. Test Scores Reveal"), it seems that every study, no matter how problematic, has spawned a headline, simply because it talks about charters' effects on test scores.

Many studies, including the AFT one, are inherently suspect, inasmuch as they look only at student achievement levels at a single point in time, thereby telling us little or nothing about how much pupils are *learning*.

MPR, to its credit, plans to follow students over time. Unfortunately, by focusing mainly on the middle school, it is still headed down the wrong track.

> Charters may be most effective when they receive students at an early age.

Two high-quality studies presented in this issue of *Education Next* highlight the seriousness of the matter. In the research section (p. 52), Caroline Hoxby and Jonah Rockoff use a randomized experiment research design to evaluate three Chicago charter schools. Because these charters held a lottery to select their students, the research team could compare the achievement of applicants who were admitted with a similar group who remained in a traditional public school. The researchers found strong, positive effects of the charter school experience for younger children.

By contrast, Robert Bifulco and Helen Ladd (p. 60), use data from North Carolina to compare the test score gains of students in charter schools with their previous gains in traditional public schools. Students entering charter schools in grades 4–8 fell behind as a result of the move.

One explanation for differing results from the two studies is that they simply studied different schools. The more interesting possibility is that together they show charters to be most effective when they receive children at an early age.

It is thus unfortunate that the projected federal study of charters, unless quickly redesigned, will focus primarily on middle schools. Like the drunk, the feds are searching in the wrong place, simply because one light bulb is cheaper than another. The country could be left just as much in the dark at the end of the study as it is today.

— Marci Kanstoroom

MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K-12 education, but *Education Next* partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.

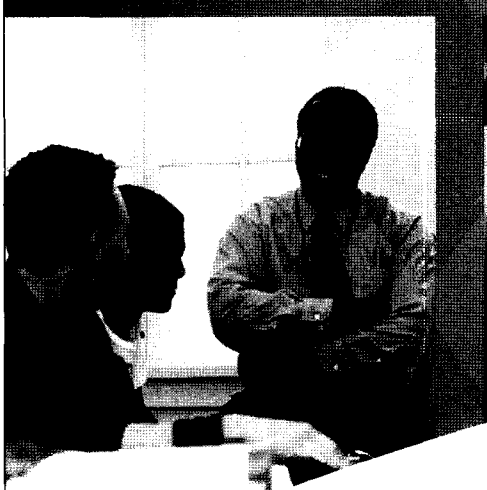
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Edexcellence.net:

THOMAS B. FORDHAM FOUNDATION
OUTSIDE THE BOX

www.edexcellence.net

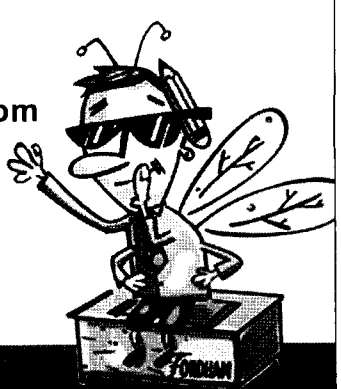
and action in K-12 education
Thomas B. Fordham Foundation



Resources for research and action in education reform

Groundbreaking new reports in K-12 education

Weekly news and analysis from the Education Gadfly

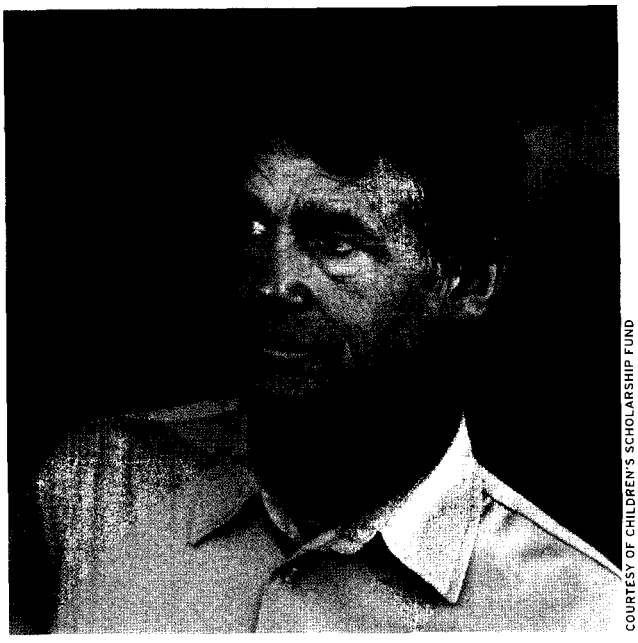


www.edexcellence.net

Education Gadfly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Tribute to John Walton



COURTESY OF CHILDREN'S SCHOLARSHIP FUND

At the edge of a fault line between two tectonic plates, the Grand Teton towers some five thousand feet over Jackson Hole below. There, near his beloved family home, John Walton, a risk-taker of the kind seldom witnessed within the world of large-scale philanthropy, died tragically on June 27, 2005, while flying a small, experimental plane. His memory will be held dear not only by his family and friends but also by thousands of low-income families, for whose children he helped find better schools. For more than two decades, he devoted much of his heart, time, intellect and charitable resources to finding a way to put children first so that genuine equality of education opportunity could be secured for all Americans.

John Walton's father, Sam, discovered that placing the consumer first was the key to creating a worldwide retailing system that gave working people access to quality products previously beyond their means. John committed himself to doing much the same thing for the education system, seeking to redesign its very framework so that parents, regardless of means, would be in command. Motivated by a faith that gave deep roots to his simple, strong values and tenacity to his vision, he believed that his country's renewal depended on the reform of its schools.

Sam's accomplishment, while one of the great commercial triumphs, was in some ways less impressive than his son's intrepid struggle, if only because the marketplace for retailers was already woven into American practice. John's daring drive to transform the country's schools challenged both conventional wisdom and a thicket of entrenched interests.

From the beginning, however, John Walton understood the magnitude of the task. He realized that without markets systems do not change. He knew that putting families and children ahead of vested interests would provoke relentless resistance that even might have endangered the company on which the family fortune rested.

But Walton, who had worn the Green Beret, felt no goal worth pursuing if risk were not attached. Not for him the safe philanthropy expected to enhance a corporate image. No, his concern was always focused on the consumer: in this case, the poor children who needed better schools if they were to experience the American dream.

Focused on the goal, Walton was flexible as to means. He gave great sums to privately funded voucher programs, hoping that those funds would spur public action. When this seemed insufficient, he came up with more direct political strategies, especially the mobilization of poor, inner-city, minority families whose plight, if articulated clearly, might win over public opinion. When charter schools appeared on the reform horizon, he was quick to explore ways to increase their numbers and make them more effective. Always, he understood that gains could be achieved only by maintaining a strategic vision, forming broad alliances, ignoring the temptation to micromanage, and allowing others, with less at stake, to take most of the credit.

To Walton, commitment, not ceremony, was what counted. Just as he avoided formalities and fashion in favor of shirtsleeves and jeans, so he avoided press releases, public pronouncements, and platitudes in favor of quiet discussions about what really mattered.

True, he wanted to move quickly and decisively, entering the fray with the impact for which Sam Walton had been well known. But as he discovered that the framers of the American Constitution had created a system that could change only slowly, he acquired a more patient strategic vision.

The full range of his accomplishments is yet to be tallied. Yet even a preliminary assessment is remarkable, beginning with John Walton's major contribution to the nationwide Children's Scholarship Fund, which revealed to a broad public the desire for school choice among low-income families. That was only the most visible of the Walton contributions. In addition, he provided support and guidance to the successful efforts to secure publicly funded voucher trials in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in Florida, and in the District of Columbia; aided the litigation that resulted in the constitutional validation of school vouchers by the U. S. Supreme Court; helped extend the charter school movement; and became a key founder and trustee for the newly formed Alliance for School Choice.

Tectonic change builds mountains, but it does so an inch at a time. John's mortal remains now rest in a mountain's shadow, but his spirit continues to guide us toward the distant summit.

— The Editors

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Getting the Right Principals

I just finished reading "The Accidental Principal" by Frederick Hess and Andrew Kelly (*Features*, Summer 2005), with great interest and agreement. I have been in public education for 33 years, 4 of them as an adjunct professor in education administration. When I'd had all I could take of exactly what Hess and Kelly described in their article, I quit. I felt there were better ways to affect the system.

It had become painfully clear that teacher colleges were more concerned with covering everything required by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) than with preparing good school administrators. Many times I saw the great frustration of other professors who were interrupting good learning to "cover" NCATE standards.

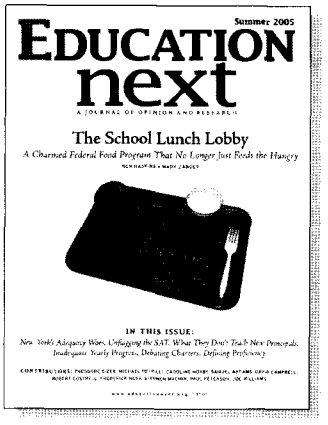
It's exactly what I see in all our schools, where administrators are more concerned with jumping through all the hoops than with educating kids. Perhaps it's time to admit that central planning isn't working any better in education than it did in the Soviet Union.

DR. STEVE WYCKOFF
Educational Services and Staff Development Association of Central Kansas
Hutchinson, Kansas

Unflagged and Unequal

When the College Board stopped flagging the SAT scores of students who took the tests with accommodations (most commonly, extended time) in 2004, it instituted a tightened eligibility process to offset the new stigma-free advantage.

In his examination of the 2003 and 2004 SAT I results, both flagged and unflagged ("Unflagged SATs," *Features*, Summer 2005), Samuel J. Abrams found that the eligibility process became a hidden advantage for students whose parents and schools were


Summer 2005
EDUCATION next
A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH
The School Lunch Lobby
A Charmed Federal Food Program That No Longer Just Feeds the Hungry
IN THIS ISSUE:

more skilled at meeting tightened eligibility requirements—documentation from therapists and psychologists—than families "less savvy and less financially endowed."

Perhaps it's time to admit that central planning isn't working any better in education than it did in the Soviet Union.

Indeed, the increase in the scores of students with accommodations in the District of Columbia is dramatic, and Abrams attributes the anomaly to the division between extremes of wealth within the District. But he is not quite correct. The extremes are there, but they are within the entire metropolitan area, including the Maryland and Virginia suburbs. Many of the students living in these richer areas attend private schools in D.C. and contribute to the high scores in the city.

More significantly, on these schools' college counseling web pages there are links to the College Board's "site for students with disabilities" as well as other disability sources. The web site of Georgetown Day School has a four-page Learning Disabilities section that includes a detailed list of the categories of professionals who can diagnose LD and ADHD.

By contrast, many of the public high schools don't even have web sites.

Unflagging the scores in 2004 tilted the playing field to the advantage of parents most skilled at working the system; the high number of flagged scores in 2003 suggests that the College Board saw stigma where sophisticated parents saw advantage. The stiffened eligibility process increased their advantage at the expense of the less skilled, when it created a de facto double standard.

ERICH MARTEL
Teacher, world history and AP U.S. history
Woodrow Wilson H.S.
Washington, D.C.

Mel Levine's Brain

It is unfortunate that Dr. Daniel Willingham took a rather superficial view of our work in reviewing Dr. Mel Levine's most recent popular press books for his article "Mind over Matter" (*Check the Facts*, Spring 2005). Both books, *A Mind at a Time* and *The Myth of Laziness*, were intended to describe Dr. Levine's neurodevelopmental framework for a general audience and provide examples from his clinical cases; they were not intended to describe the research base on which Dr. Levine's neurodevelopmental framework is founded.

Those who read Dr. Levine's entire body of work carefully will find that it is rooted in rigorous scientific research as well as sound clinical judgment and experience. Dr. Levine has developed and refined an accurate and usable framework of the mind and its functions. His 1992 book, *Developmental Variation and Learning Disorders*,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was written for a more academic audience and includes citations of the research, theory, and clinical experience on which his framework is based. Dr. Levine's theoretical framework is based on existing research from across a variety of scientific and academic disciplines as well as the convergence of clinical evidence and experience. Some of Dr. Willingham's misunderstanding may be the inevitable result of the wide gap that often separates clinical studies and frontline experience from research in a field like cognitive psychology. In addition, different disciplines that study learning vary significantly in their terminology and conceptual models.

At All Kinds of Minds [a research organization established by Dr. Levine] our continual goal is to use our theoretical framework to help those who have an immediate need: the students who struggle to learn and the parents, teachers, and clinicians who strive to help them achieve success in school and in life. Many critical clinical problems have not been rigorously researched. Nevertheless, they need to be addressed vigorously using the best possible judgment by educators and clinicians. To date, the feedback we have received from thousands of teachers and parents is that our programs make a dramatic difference in their lives.

The All Kinds of Minds Institute is committed to rigorous, high-quality research. Over the past three years, All Kinds of Minds has made a multimillion-dollar investment in building our research infrastructure and fielding three national independent research studies. In addition, several small-scale independent studies have already found that the Schools Attuned program has a positive impact on student and teacher outcomes. In the coming years we will continue to solicit input from the scientific, clinical, and education communities to inform the further development of our programs. We invite the academic research community to study our framework and programs thoroughly. We will carefully vet and incorporate all appropriate emerging research into our theoretical framework and programs.

ANN E. HARMAN
Director of Research
All Kinds of Minds Institute

Daniel Willingham replies:
Harman suggests that Levine's popular press books are reader-friendly versions of a much more substantial scientific theory. That is a misrepresentation; Levine's "scientific" work is not better supported than his popular books. As I noted in my article, I called the All Kinds of Minds Institute specifically to ask for more research-oriented publications and was directed to (among others) *Developmental Variation and Learning Disorders*, to which Harman refers (although I read the 1999 second edition, not the first edition she mentions). I pointed out that these works do indeed have more references to the scientific literature, but only for well-accepted ideas (which I did not criticize), and none for the particular views Levine espouses (which I did). The second edition also happens to be the source of Levine's complete misinterpretation of research by Richard McKee and Larry Squire that I discussed.

It is a misrepresentation that Levine's popular press books are reader-friendly versions of a much more substantial scientific theory.

Harman's second point is that cognitive psychologists might view the mind differently than clinicians. It is not clear to me how that point absolves clinicians from providing data to support their views, particularly when their views conflict with existing data.

Finally, Harman notes that several small studies have found that the Schools Attuned program "has a positive effect on student and teacher outcomes." She might have added that these studies have not undergone expert peer review, nor do they compare Schools Attuned with competitor methods. To the extent that they show student effects, they show that Schools Attuned is better than nothing. I applaud the interest All Kinds of Minds has taken in evaluating the program, but I dispute that existing research has shown much of anything, least of all that the program is ready for statewide support.

Charter School Melee

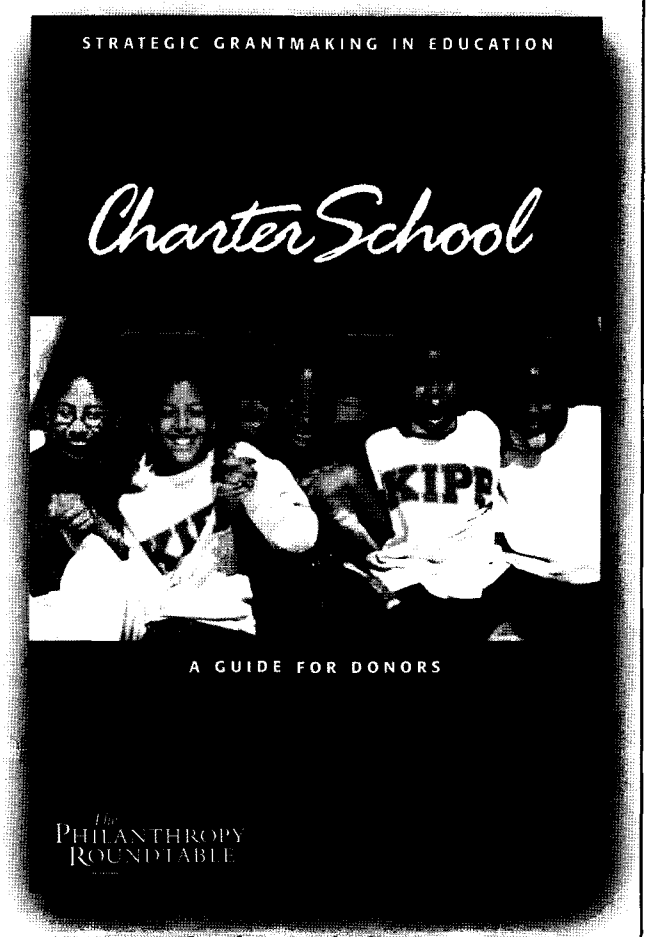
Ted Sizer and Michael Petrilli illustrate what makes education policy such an interesting field ("Identity Crisis," *Forum*, Summer 2005). The fellow writing for the "right" (Petrilli) argues for state involvement, while the fellow representing the "left" (Sizer) objects to a strong exercise of federal power.

It's a compelling discussion that avoids two of the more frustrating positions in debates about these issues: testing is all that matters or there are not actually serious problems in American education.

But even this debate seems to obscure the potential for reasonable compromise. Sizer is right about the possible excesses of No Child Left Behind—style accountability, though it's worth noting that these issues predate the law. However, is Petrilli's

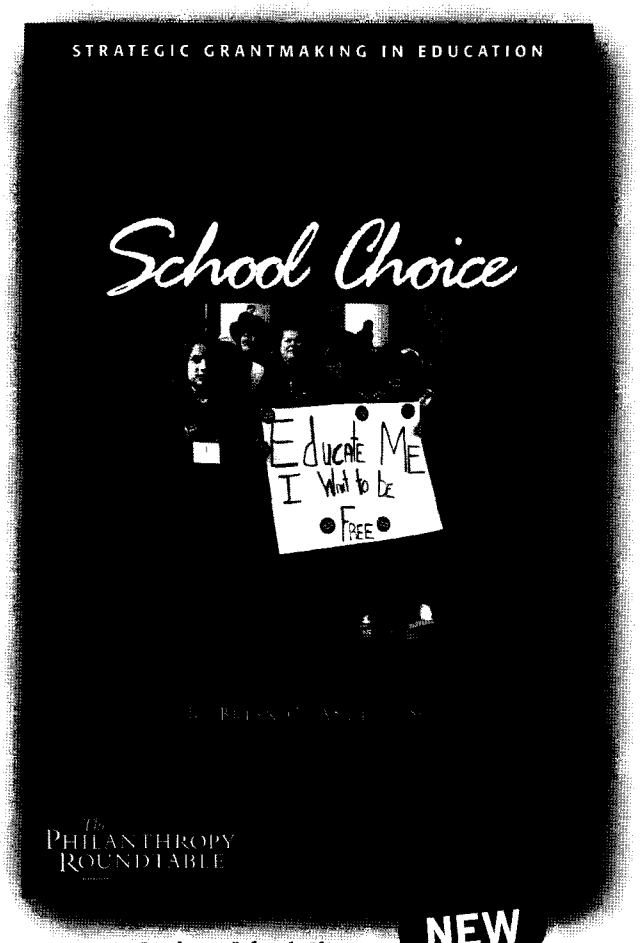
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Education



Jump-starting the Charter School Movement: A Guide for Donors

The Roundtable commissioned this guide in order to provide donors of all shapes and sizes with strategic ways to support a strong charter school movement in their communities and across the nation. This book draws on the experience of the most active and effective charter funders.



A Donor's Guide to School Choice
By Brian C. Anderson

Several powerful tools for change fall under the term "school choice:" private scholarships, charter schools, tax credits, and vouchers. This guide provides a road map to all these options, with advice from veteran donors on the pros and cons of each. Invaluable for any donor seeking to improve all schools and to help low-income children attend high-quality schools.

These definitive guides are available free to qualified donors.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plea for basic literacy and numeracy standards too much to ask? And, even in practice, is it really at odds with the rich notion of education that Sizer has long championed and in fact not something of a predicate for it?

The problem with the direction Sizer wants is that, for a variety of reasons, good intentions and localized accountability have proved an insufficient guarantee of equity for underserved students. In many walks of life, people are held accountable to external standards. Is education really so exceptional among American endeavors that it needs no such outside accountability?

Within both the traditional public and charter sectors there are schools that serve niche populations and do not lend themselves to the mainstream accountability system. However, these schools are a minority. Instead of arguing whether charter schools should be included in No Child Left Behind, a more fruitful question is how to ensure that state accountability schemes allow enough flexibility for boutique programs within the public system while not opening up loopholes that low-quality schools can slip through. That's a key issue for Congress to consider during the next reauthorization of No Child.

Apart from giving new start-ups an initial period of time to establish themselves, it is appropriate to hold the average charter school, serving similar students, to the same standards as other public schools in that community. If those standards are overly prescriptive or otherwise unreasonable, that's an issue for all schools, not a reason to carve out exceptions for charters. Rhetorically, charter foes consistently fail to note that charters are public schools; charter proponents should not substantively make the same omission.

ANDREW J. ROTHERHAM
Director of Education Policy and Senior Fellow
Progressive Policy Institute

The Inequity of Adequacy

Much appreciated is Joe Williams's excellent account of the fiscal-equity juggernaut that has rolled through New York State ("The Legal Cash Machine," *Features*, Summer 2005). The depressing results that are sure to follow from this ill-advised lawsuit will be equally unwelcome.

The tragedy of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) lawsuit is that it has resulted in mindless simplification of all debate surrounding education. By making more spending the only path to better results, we forgo the more important discussions of how, for instance, better pedagogy might improve outcomes, or how better management can direct more money to classrooms by creating transportation and procurement efficiencies.

The promise of what seems to be unlimited funds on the horizon has also created a "we can have it all" mentality. We can pay teachers more and also have more teachers (even though the number of qualified teachers in the job pool is a very finite commodity). We can build new schoolhouses rather than more efficiently use the ones we already have. We can increase available technology regardless of the capacity of the schools, their staff, and their students to absorb it. The sky is the limit. Don't worry. The new money will be here soon.

As recounted by Mr. Williams, the lawsuit began during a period when city schools were indeed being shortchanged in the allocation of state funds. But the shortchanging of the city by about $400 per student 15 years ago is ancient history. Both the state's and the city's share of education funding in New York City have skyrocketed. Education outcomes are still mixed.

Finally, in New York City, as Williams made clear, the drumbeat continues for the State of New York to assume the full $5.6 billion annual school funding increase. But few in Gotham seem to realize that beyond the sphere of economic influence and affluence of the city is a world of dire economic crisis: boarded-up strip malls lining the upstate highways and byways and devastated cities with crippled economies, unable to support their own schools, much less subsidize ours. At the same time, these are the districts that are already eyeing the CFE lawsuit as a model for their own fiscal ambitions. All will discover that there is no pot of gold buried outside Albany.

ANDREW WOLF
Columnist
The New York Sun

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the legal beat

NEA Sues over NCLB

The Bucks Are Big, but the Case Is Weak

BY JOHN R. MUNICH AND ROCCO E. TESTANI

Last April, in a move that generated many headlines but surprised almost no one, the National Education Association (NEA) and nine school districts filed a lawsuit against Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, claiming that federal funding to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was inadequate. Although the claim of "unfunded mandate" has been asserted almost since the day NCLB was signed into law, *School District of the City of Pontiac et al. v. Spellings* constitutes the first major legal challenge to the historic education law to be filed in federal court. If the suit succeeds, the Department of Education (DOE) will be asked to stop enforcing NCLB regulations until sufficient federal funds are provided.

The federal law does have language stating, "Nothing in this Act shall be construed to ... mandate a state or any subdivision thereof to ... incur any costs not paid for under this Act." While that seems clear enough, isn't the mandate to teach all children what schools are supposed to do anyway? Or could *Pontiac v. Spellings* be the ultimate adequacy case, resulting in court-ordered multibillions of dollars? Although many school districts and union leaders would like to think so, a closer look suggests otherwise.

Federal courts are generally loath to substitute their judgment for that of the agency entrusted by Congress with the task of administering a statutory program.

For one thing, the plaintiffs ignore the fact that any state can escape all regulation simply by refusing the money. If NCLB-induced costs actually surpassed the federal revenue flow, then states could simply refuse the money. Though Utah has made noises about such a move, significantly, no state has yet done so.

Further, the plaintiffs in this lawsuit would have to show a real dispute between the school district and the DOE. To prevent federal courts from premature intervention, plaintiffs are normally required to show that all administrative remedies have been pursued before a lawsuit was filed. In this case, there is no allegation that the DOE has refused a district request for a waiver of NCLB requirements. Without such a showing, the court may well refuse even to consider the case.

The NEA's legal standing is even weaker. Only parties genuinely injured by government action are allowed to bring suit. Since the NEA does not assert that the DOE has acted in a manner that specifically injures the organization, it is hard to see what standing it has in court. While it claims that teachers are being stigmatized, it would be a real stretch to argue that any stigmatization that teachers suffered because their students were not learning constituted an injury that required a legal remedy.

What about the claim that NCLB causes school districts to spend money not provided by the act? The plaintiffs rely on a handful of studies claiming to prove the high cost of accountability, but presumably those studies could be refuted by other studies that would be at least equally convincing. Even if accountability does have some fiscal cost, it will be hard to show that the cost can be uniquely attributed to NCLB. By the time NCLB was signed, the trend toward emphasizing student assessment and accountability had already spread nationwide. Nor are the courts likely to overrule allocations made by the DOE under NCLB rules. Federal courts are generally loath to substitute their judgment for that of the agency entrusted by Congress with the task of administering a statutory program.

In the end, the NEA and the nine school districts that have taken this legal plunge face a difficult task to show that they are the right plaintiffs to bring this suit, at this time, against this agency. Even if they get past the procedural hurdles, substantial factual issues concerning accountability costs will impede their journey. Even if they overcome all these barriers, the plaintiffs must persuade a federal court to enjoin the DOE's administration of NCLB simply because school districts say they need more money. That refrain, more money, is one that has been heard countless times before, by legislators, policymakers, and the courts. Without the proper legal basis, this particular version of the song is not likely to resonate.

John R. Munich and Rocco E. Testani are partners in the Education, Government and Civil Rights Litigation Practice Group of Sutherland Asbill & Brennan, LLP.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An Education Mayor Takes Charge

The Picture in New York

I

A Nega

n the Positive Side

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Negative Assessment

An Education Revolution That Never Was

BY SOL STERN

"Minority kids so [illegible] reading," screamed the banner headline on the *New York Post*'s front page earlier this year. Along with its rival tabloid, the *Daily News*, the *Post* supported Mayor Michael Bloomberg's education reforms and now has credited those reforms for a "record setting" 10 percent improvement in the city's scores on state-administered 4th-grade reading tests.

Actually, it's anyone's guess why the 4th-grade scores rose so sharply this year at the same time that the 8th-grade reading and social studies scores went from bad to worse (with only 32.8 percent of city 8th graders meeting state standards in reading and 20 percent in social studies). It could well be due to broader educational forces or to changes in testing procedures. Either could explain why 4th-grade scores were up throughout the state, and student gains in Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers were even more impressive than in Gotham (see Hanushek, "Pseudo-Science," pp. 67-73).

In any case, no reputable researcher would rely on a one-year bump in some test scores to judge the efficacy of a new program. In the absence of independent confirmation by testing experts, one should remain highly skeptical of the claims of Mayor Bloomberg and his supporters that his instructional initiatives are working.

Unfortunately, this is also an election year, which means that political spin is likely to drown out reasoned debate about what policies are most likely to work in inner-city classrooms. The premise of mayoral control was that the public would finally be able to hold someone accountable for the schools. But the billionaire mayor has almost unlimited resources to win an electoral spin war, regardless of the reality in the classroom. In addition to dipping into his private fortune for unlimited campaign ads touting his test score gains, he has total control of a $15 billion education empire that doles out jobs and no-bid contracts to potential critics and spends millions on a well-oiled public relations machine, but spends nothing on independent research or evaluation of classroom programs. This has consequences for the national education debate as well. If Bloomberg is reelected, his model of reform through dictatorial mayoral control will surely be urged on other troubled urban school districts.

Before that model is exported anywhere else, however, serious thought ought to be given to what the mayor promised and what he has actually delivered.

City Hall Rules

It once seemed to be a good thing for education reform that Mike Bloomberg was so rich. Having financed his first election campaign completely out of his deep pockets, Bloomberg was unencumbered by debts owed to the system's entrenched interest groups, including the powerful union representing 80,000 teachers. In this favorable political climate, the new

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mayor was quickly able to persuade the state legislature to vest him with total control of the schools. Even the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) supported the reform legislation after Mayor Bloomberg gave the teachers a 16 percent across-the-board wage hike (plus an extra 5 percent for beginning teachers).

Crammed with thousands of redundant bureaucrats and patronage appointees, the Board of Education's labyrinthine headquarters building at 110 Livingston Street in downtown Brooklyn was the most notorious symbol of the old regime. The mayor seized control of the building, cleaned out the time-servers and the patronage nests, and then sold off the property to the highest bidder. A few hundred top administrators who survived the purge were relocated to the newly renovated Tweed Courthouse building a few hundred feet from City Hall, where the mayor could keep a close eye on them.

The mayor seemed equally bold in his selection of Joel Klein, former chief of the Justice Department's antitrust division, as schools' chancellor. The highlight of Klein's career to that point was his prosecution of the Microsoft Corporation for antitrust violations. Bringing in a "trust buster" to help reinvent a monopoly public school system was hailed by many education reformers (myself included) as a stroke of genius and more proof of Mayor Bloomberg's commitment to radical change.

Bloomberg and Klein then created what appeared to be a streamlined structure for efficiently managing the city's 1,300 schools. Instead of overlapping administrative layers operating through 32 separate school districts, there would now be one clear chain of command extending vertically from the mayor's office to the chancellor, then down through ten regional superintendents, and finally to the principal of every school in the system.

So much for the Management 101 part. What happens in the classroom of the new order?

The mayor presented his master plan, called Children First, in an inspired Martin Luther King Day speech in January 2003. Standing in front of a portrait of Reverend King at the Schomburg cultural center in Harlem, he described the effort to improve the schools as a "civil rights" battle. The administration's new approach, Bloomberg said, was to allow the chancellor's office to "dictate the curriculum and pedagogical methods," including a reading program with "a daily focus on phonics." The mayor also promised, "Our teachers will all employ strategies proven to work." A few days later Chancellor Klein announced that the mainstay of the new citywide literacy curriculum would be a program called Month-by-Month Phonics.

The references to phonics and "strategies proven to work" seemed like a calculated hint that the businessman mayor would favor a return to "basics." This was music to the ears of education traditionalists bemoaning the use of *unproven* progressive methodologies in inner-city classrooms. Still, Bloomberg also offered plenty of red meat to those reformers pushing for school choice, competition, and incentives in education. Vouchers remain off the table in New York, but Chancellor Klein soon came out for the next best thing: charter schools. He also pressed for reform of the onerous work rules in the teachers' contract, including eliminating the seniority provisions, making it easier to fire incompetents, and establishing a system of merit pay.

For pushing these market-style initiatives, Klein and Bloomberg have been celebrated in the media and the business community as courageous visionaries, even revolutionaries. Two of the nation's most influential education philanthropies, the Gates Foundation and the Eli Broad Foundation, are deeply invested in Bloomberg's structural reforms and see them as national models of reform. The same Bill Gates whose company was prosecuted by Assistant Attorney General Joel Klein has given Chancellor Klein at least $70 million for creating hundreds of new small high schools and charter schools. And California billionaire Eli Broad, who helped finance the Children First planning phase, predicted that Bloomberg and Klein would soon succeed in turning around the schools.

Calamity of the Lams

The only reform that ever matters in education is doing whatever it takes to lift student academic achievement and reduce the scandalous racial gap in learning. Unfortunately, somewhere along the road to the brave new world of charter schools and market incentives, Bloomberg and Klein either forgot, or never comprehended in the first place, that all good education, and, even more so, education for disadvantaged children, starts with systematic and explicit instruction in the basic skills of literacy, numeracy, and other foundational academic subjects. By that standard, there is nothing at all revolutionary about the progressive pedagogy that now rules New York's schools. Even

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

worse, the administration's authoritarian attempts to impose a single instructional approach throughout the system have so demoralized and frightened rank-and-file teachers that it is now virtually impossible for the city to get much-needed reforms of work rules in the next teachers' contract.

The selection of Month-by-Month Phonics in January 2003 provided the first clue that there was an instructional void at the heart of the Bloomberg/Klein reforms. Not only has this program never met the "proven to work" standard set by the mayor; it isn't even a systematic phonics program, despite its name. Even the authors of the program concede the point. Phonics, they argue, is only "one-quarter of a well-balanced literary diet."

The authors' invocation of "balance" was a giveaway. Real phonics instruction teaches children about the sounds of spoken language and how letters represent those sounds. "Balanced literacy" is the brand name for an instructional approach that adds a dollop of phonics to an otherwise whole-language reading program in which children are encouraged to "construct" or decipher meaning from so-called authentic texts. It's a clever marketing ploy that allows school districts to appear to be responding to growing pressure from lawmakers and parents for explicit phonics instruction while doing the opposite.

Mayor Bloomberg likely was never told that Month-by-Month Phonics was part of a stealth whole-language program. The same excuse can't be made for Chancellor Klein, who chose to surround himself with a palace guard of progressive educators who all hate phonics. The key managerial decision in this regard was Klein's selection in August 2002 of Diana Lam as deputy chancellor for teaching and learning at $250,000 per year, the same salary as his own, surely one of the most embarrassing hiring decisions in the history of New York City government. Lam flamed out in less than 18 months after she was caught in a nepotism scandal, but the education damage she caused during her brief tenure was incalculable.

As schools' chief in Providence, Rhode Island, Lam assiduously promoted balanced literacy and "fuzzy" math programs, but the results were nothing to write home about. Fifty-four of the 55 schools in the district were listed by the state as "low performing" when she got there. After she left, three years later, only one of those schools had moved up a notch. Nevertheless, Klein gave her control over curriculum and pedagogical decisions during the planning stages of Children First. It was Lam who convinced Klein that balanced literacy, with its phony phonics component, should be used in virtually all schools.

With Klein's approval, Lam also managed to wipe out one of the few instructional programs that actually met Mayor Bloomberg's "proven to work" standard. It's an explicit phonics program called Success for All that was put into 50 of the city's lowest-performing schools in the late 1990s. Reading scores went up in those schools for four consecutive years. Yet despite the program's good track record and the $27 million that the city had invested in it, Lam dumped it without even so much as a phone call to the program's developer, Robert Slavin. "She decided on the first day not to listen to other voices," Slavin said.

Klein and Lam launched their jihad against phonics at a rather inopportune moment. The National Reading Panel commissioned by Congress had concluded, based on an analysis of 52 randomized scientific studies, that effective reading programs, especially for kids living in poverty, require "systematic and explicit" instruction in phonics. Because of this converging scientific consensus, the No Child Left Behind Act requires school districts to demonstrate that they are using reading programs that have been tested for their efficacy through scientific studies in order to qualify for federal reading funds.

Mayor Bloomberg was warned repeatedly by federal and state education officials that Month-by-Month Phonics wouldn't qualify for the $34 million annually in reading funds available to the city. In a letter to Bloomberg, Klein, and Lam, seven noted reading specialists, including three who had served on the National Reading Panel, said that Month-by-Month Phonics is "woefully inadequate," "lacks a research base," and "puts beginning readers at risk of failure in learning to read." The federal government would be guilty of malpractice if it funded a reading program that its own experts said "puts beginning readers at risk of failure." That alone should have led Bloomberg and Klein to reverse course immediately in the interests of the children and to fire Diana Lam.

Instead, the Bloomberg administration treated the scientists' letter as a political and public relations problem. Enter Professor Lucy Calkins of Teachers College, the doyenne of balanced literacy in New York, with $6 million in city contracts to train teachers for the program. Although the experts' letter was private, Calkins rounded up a posse of 100 ed-school professors, most of whom had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nothing to do with reading instruction, to write a counter-letter made public by the administration. It was hardly hot news that education school professors hate phonics. Nevertheless, the administration tried to persuade the public that the letter with 100 signatures outweighed the one from a mere seven reading scientists, as if an educators' plebiscite could resolve the evidentiary questions about the effectiveness of the reading program.

After stonewalling for almost a year, Chancellor Klein found a way out of the dilemma. He agreed to install a phonics program called Harcourt Trophies in only 49 schools in order to qualify for the federal funds. Klein's gamesmanship was unnecessary and tragic. It should have been a no-brainer for the city to pick up more than $200 million in federal funds over six years for something it should have been doing all along. So why would an education administration that claims to care only about the interests of kids decide to use a reading program, Month-by-Month Phonics, that does not meet the standard for effectiveness established by a broad consensus of scientists?

The Romance of Progressivism

The answer is that the progressive educators empowered by Chancellor Klein shudder at the thought that science confers validity on the practice of teaching young children to read through heavily scripted lessons in letter/sound correspondence. Their pedagogical starting point is the great Romantic idea, starting with Rousseau, that children learn naturally (including learning to read). Thus the role of the teacher is to facilitate this natural process through hands-on, "constructivist" activity in "child-centered" classrooms. This can be seen vividly in a CD video distributed by the chancellor's office to all teachers in 2003 and that was still posted on the Department of Education's (DOE) web site as of May 2005.

As the video opens, Klein announces, "This CD will walk you through the research upon which we based our decisions regarding our program choices." The implication is that the city's search for the "best practices" was intellectually serious. Not so. Otherwise, this instructional guide would not be dominated by the pedagogical principles of a radical education guru from Australia named Brian Cambourne, who believes that teachers ought to encourage their students to achieve a "literacy for social equity and social justice."

Professor Cambourne says he came to his theories when he discovered that many of his poorly performing students were actually quite bright. To his surprise, almost all demonstrated competence at challenging tasks in the real adult world, including poker. This led to the brainstorm that children learn better in natural settings with a minimum amount of adult help. So important does Joel Klein's education department deem Cambourne's theories to be that it instructs all city teachers to go through a checklist to make sure their classroom practices meet the down-under education professor's "Conditions for Learning." Which of four scenarios most accurately describes how your classroom is set up? teachers are asked. If the teacher can claim "a variety of center-based activities, for purposeful learning using different strategies, and for students to flow as needed," she can pat herself on the back. But if her classroom is set up "for lecture with rows facing forward," she must immediately change her practice.

You might ask whether there's any evidence for such pedagogy. It's "weak to nonexistent," according to Reid Lyon, former head of all reading research at the National Institutes of Health. "The philosophical and romantic notion that children learn to read naturally and through incidental exposure to print and literature has no scientific merit whatsoever."

That hasn't deterred Chancellor Klein in the least. Constructivist pedagogical guidelines are forced on classroom teachers in weekly "professional development" sessions that are closer to a military boot camp than any serious inquiry into the best classroom practices. No dissent is allowed. Teachers are given lists of "nonnegotiables," a strange and embarrassing concept for any education enterprise. Thus students must not be sitting in rows. Teachers are forbidden to stand at the head of the class and do "chalk and talk" at the blackboard. There must be a "workshop" (students working in groups) in every single reading period. Teachers are also provided with classroom maps indicating the exact location of the teacher's desk, the students' writing stations, and exactly how much of the wall space should be set aside for posting student work. Also nonnegotiable is that every elementary school classroom must have a rug.

Is it surprising then that Chancellor Klein is facing a revolt from teachers like 13-year veteran Jackie Bennett, from a Staten Island high school? Ms. Bennett's problem is that she believes it's not a sin to bring her knowledge of great literature to her students, even if she occasionally lectures. After all, Bennett has a master's in English literature from Columbia University, exactly the kind of academic attainment we supposedly want more of from our teachers.

"DOE administrators talk about balance," Ms. Bennett recently wrote in an unpublished letter to the *New York Times*.

> What they really want is all-group, all the time. What's more, the message is clear: when we visit your classes and the kids are not in groups, you have one strike against you.
>
> My recent experience at staff development is illustrative of just how clear that message is intended to be. After spending the morning working with my colleagues on a small group activity that entailed busywork that did nothing to further our development as teachers, we returned to a whole-class discussion to briefly assess what we had learned. I raised my hand

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and asked if there was any research tying group work to better test scores. The answer was no.

My behavior was reported to the Local Instructional Superintendent, and two days later, my assistant principal asked me to forgo attendance at the remaining meetings. I had, it seems, been kicked out of staff development. Had I made a ruckus? No. But I had asked uncomfortable questions. I had thought critically. Though the City's Department of Education gives lip service to teaching kids to think critically, it is clear they want those critical thinking skills taught by drones.

Tyranny in the Classroom

Chancellor Klein has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on mandated professional development sessions of the kind that Jackie Bennett describes. Yet there's no research evaluating the effectiveness of a program that is eating up so much of the city's budget and its teachers' precious time. New York City has nothing like the independent research consortium, based at the University of Chicago, which provides objective third-party evaluation and analysis of performance data supplied by the Chicago school system.

What's indisputable, however, is that the intellectually vacuous nature of these sessions and the central administration's tyranny over classroom instruction is demoralizing many excellent and successful teachers. The city will surely lose many of them. "There isn't one teacher I know who doesn't say they would leave if they could," says Norman Scott, a 35-year veteran classroom teacher and publisher of an independent newsletter for city teachers. In the meantime thousands of teachers have taken to the streets in union-organized protests over Klein's instructional dictatorship. "Let teachers teach," say the placards carried at these demonstrations. At a recent UFT rally, union president Randi Weingarten said: "We knew that a top-down, command and control management and rigid, lockstep teaching mandates would be demoralizing. But I never imagined that guidelines for, say, the workshop model, complete with its limit of ten minutes of direct instruction, would devolve into orders to use it every day, for every lesson and every group of students."

Klein and Mayor Bloomberg have countered that all the tumult in the street is nothing but posturing over a contract dispute. The UFT wants more money, they say, but no reform of the work rules. They are right that the existing contract is a lousy deal for everyone involved. I have been writing about the contract's excellence-killing seniority rules, its lockstep pay schedules, and its other inflexible regulations for years (see "Facade of Excellence," *Education Next*, Summer 2003). In fact, Joel Klein once told me he had read my critique of the contract, and from time to time he has even borrowed my quip that this is the ultimate "we-don't-do-windows" labor agreement.

The problem is that, because Chancellor Klein has tyrannized all teachers with mindless directives about their classroom practices, he has forfeited any chance of getting significant work-rule changes. Why would any self-respecting teacher be willing to give Chancellor Klein even more power over his or her professional life? Come to think of it, Chancellor Klein has managed to incorporate one of the worst characteristics of the teachers' contract into his own professional development regime. It's the pernicious idea that all teachers are of equal value to a school and should be treated accordingly. Thus the contract mandates that the math teacher with a Ph.D. who teaches AP calculus is on the exact same pay scale as the 7th-grade gym teacher. The teacher who works 60 hours a week, spending extra time with students and parents, is equal to the teacher putting in the contractual minimum of 6 hours and 40 minutes per day.

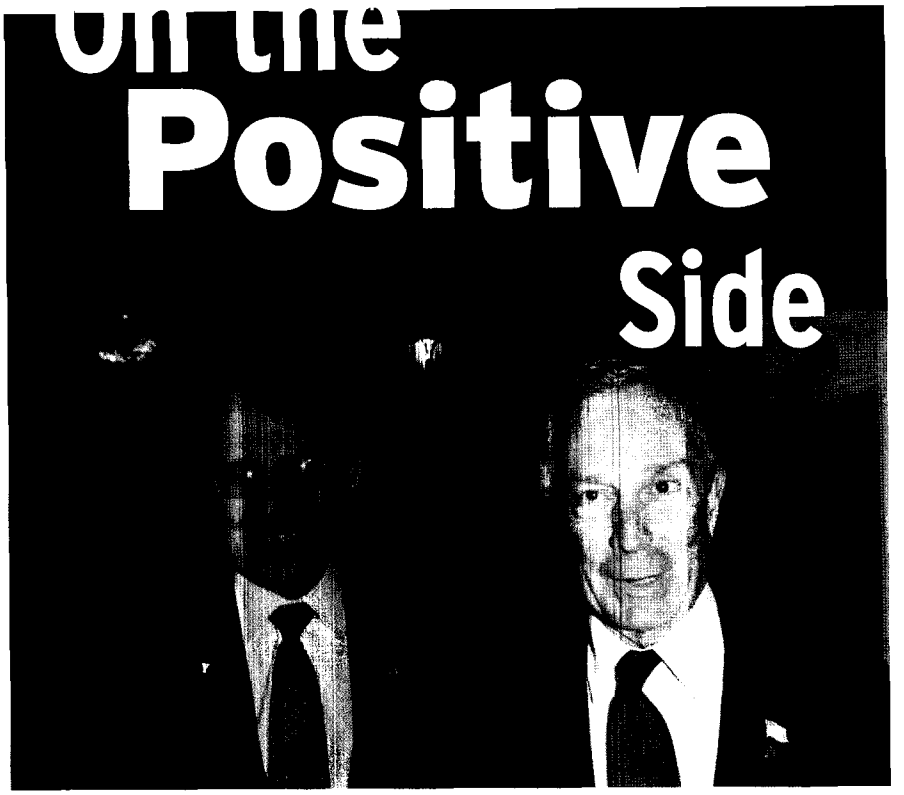
But consider Chancellor Klein's professional development program. It is meant to indoctrinate and remold virtually every teacher in the system, regardless of that teacher's level of academic attainment, years of experience, established record of success, or personal teaching style. All are herded into professional development boot camp, the 13-year veteran with a master's degree in English literature next to the rookie just out of education school. All are forced to slavishly parrot progressive education theories and apply them in their classrooms. Just as the teachers' contract undermines teaching excellence, Klein's professional development regime demoralizes good professional educators with a previous track record of success.

In the balance between the rules of the teachers' contract and the rules of Joel Klein's pedagogical dictatorship, there is now more harm in the latter. There's always time to change the contract, which is renegotiated every two years or so. In the meantime, creative principals still find ways to work around its restrictions. But if Mayor Bloomberg is reelected, city teachers face four more years of relentless indoctrination in an unproved classroom methodology.

It is true that Chancellor Klein has created dozens of new charter schools and small, new high schools. But school reformers ought not to be so fixated on getting the market incentives right that they lose sight of the fact that what actually happens day by day in the classroom, the content of what teachers actually teach, is the acid test of all education improvement. By that standard the Bloomberg/Klein legacy is an unsettling one. It leaves in place a demoralized teaching staff and classroom practices that in the long run stand little chance of narrowing the racial gap in learning, unless, that is, progressive education finally succeeds in dumbing down all students. This is not a product made for export.

Sol Stern is the author of Breaking Free: Public School Lessons and the Imperative of School Choice.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Bloomberg and Klein Seek to Repair a Failure Factory

BY JOE WILLIAMS

The history books will show that New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg seized control of the city's sprawling public school bureaucracy and its 1.1 million students on July 1, 2002. But it was 18 months later when New Yorkers got their first real taste of what mayoral control and accountability were supposed to be about.

It was December of 2003, with the holidays fast approaching, when reports of violence inside several high schools got plastered all over the local press. Readers of the city's dailies were treated to a host of stories about out-of-control students caught brandishing weapons, a teacher and a student being taken away on stretchers after a fight at a school in the Bronx, and students at several schools assaulting school safety officers.

Of course, school officials downplayed the incidents, even suggesting that the teachers union was playing games with the crime numbers. But everything changed when a front-page story in the *New York Times* pinned the blame for the surge in crimes squarely on Bloomberg's sloppy reorganization efforts. In the process of eliminating the city's numerous community school district offices, it seemed, school leaders had failed to come up with a new method for conducting suspension hearings for violent and unruly students. The new, centralized office couldn't keep up with the demands for the suspension hearings within the required five days of the incident and many violent students walked, in this case, sent back to their schools, reclaiming seats alongside their victims. The message to students was clear: there are no more consequences for violent and dangerous behavior.

But Bloomberg, who had dared New Yorkers to hold him accountable for his ability to improve schools, chose to respond in a way New Yorkers had never seen before: he accepted the blame and pledged to fix it. "We have done a lousy job," the mayor said in a stunning mea culpa on his weekly radio show hours after the *Times* story hit the streets. "You cannot blame anybody else. . . . I wanted control [of schools], and I got control. And I am going to do something about it."

The Promise

Thousands of column inches have been written about Gotham's latest experiment in school governance, affecting everything from curriculum (and its accompanying demands that teachers incorporate reading rugs and rocking chairs into their lessons) to managerial and administrative restructuring. And while all of those things certainly matter in terms of what happens inside the city's 1,300 schools, many influential New Yorkers are not sure this is what they bargained for when they demanded that responsibility for the city's schools be placed on the mayor's shoulders.

The New York City Board of Education that Bloomberg replaced had been a failure factory. No one was ultimately in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

charge of making sure children were educated, and thus no one could be held accountable. The schools' organizational structure itself for years seemed to be designed to protect anyone from ever having to take the blame for anything. The mayor, schools' chancellor, board of education, 32 different community school superintendents (and their 32 school boards) all pointed fingers at one another year after year as students moved through the nation's largest school system without getting much of an education. Corruption and incompetence were widespread, and those who did attempt to place the academic needs of children at the top of the bureaucratic food chain faced tall odds in a system that was already stacked against them.

Perhaps the most controversial effort to instill a sense of order in the system was Bloomberg's plan to end social promotion in 3rd (and then later 5th) grade.

Mayor Bloomberg was thus applauded when he made gaining control of this mess his top priority. He referred to the Board of Education as a "rinky-dink candy store" that was incapable of reforming itself. "I want to be held accountable for the results, and I will be," Bloomberg said.

As with any school reform effort, this one has not been smooth sailing for the billionaire mayor and his hand-picked chancellor, Joel Klein, a former head of the Justice Department's antitrust division during the Clinton administration. Every success appears to have a countervailing failure, or some sort of negative unintended consequence. Some critics have charged the new administration with doing too much too fast; others of doing too little, too late. "This is an evolution not a revolution," Bloomberg said, attempting to downplay expectations that conditions would improve overnight.

The willingness to admit that his team had screwed up on the school crime and safety, and then proactively do something about it, was what civic leaders had in mind when they called for "clear lines of accountability" in a school system that previously had none. So while critics will rightly debate and second-guess the administration's decisions, management styles, and personnel moves as they relate to schools, the point of this governing structure was that someone should be forced to feel the heat when things go horribly wrong in schools. When Deputy Chancellor Diana Lam got in deep water in 2004 for trying to secure a six-figure school job for her husband, Bloomberg was said to have personally called for her head, despite Klein's public expression of support for Lam when the story broke. This was about the buck finally stopping with someone, Bloomberg aides said at the time.

Previous mayors have had the luxury of distancing themselves from the city's troubled school system, hurling insults at school chancellors and school board members from the comfort of their podium at City Hall. Bloomberg not only tied his fortunes to the schools in a symbolic way; he physically moved the system's headquarters from 110 Livingston Street, a sprawling old building in Brooklyn, to the refurbished Tweed Courthouse directly behind the mayor's office at City Hall in Lower Manhattan.

But in November 2005 Bloomberg will be held accountable for the state of the schools in a way that no one in the city's history ever has: at the ballot box. To be sure, this new accountability system has been difficult to swallow at times, not just for politicians, but for parents and teachers as well. Bloomberg took considerable heat in the spring of 2004 after he fired two appointees from his own advisory Panel for Educational Policy because they unexpectedly opposed his plan to retain poorly performing 3rd graders. But the clear message from Bloomberg at the time was this: let me do what I think needs to be done with the schools, and if it doesn't work, you can vote for someone else in 2005. Essentially, top-down management was virtually ensured by the fact that the person at the top was the one whose fortunes would rise or fall based on what happened in classrooms all over the city.

Klein has called the previous decisionmaking structure, in which unions and other special interests had been given rampant opportunities to influence (or veto) decisions, as the "politics of paralysis." Predictably, the unions were among the first critics of Bloomberg and Klein's reforms, complaining that they were being left out of important decisions. And while there have been many bumps along the way (Bloomberg himself suggested that the implementation of the new 3rd-grade retention plan made administrators look like "the gang that couldn't shoot straight"), the administration's reforms represent the first attempt to analyze the state of the city's education operation and to develop responses, all without having to get the blessing of special-interest groups that might have stood in the way, so far, regardless of the results.

It could be years before the world knows for sure whether the reforms launched by Bloomberg and Klein were the correct call. Klein has been clear that he wishes to be judged ultimately on his ability to graduate more students who are prepared for careers or college-level work. His controversial attempts to retain 3rd graders who aren't on grade level and the rapid growth in the number of small high schools both were designed to eventually address the city's high-school problem, where fewer than one in ten black and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hispanic students graduate with a Regents diploma. It will be another eight years before the 3rd graders who were subjected to the new retention plan will be high-school seniors, suggesting it could be a decade before that particular reform has been adequately evaluated.

In the meantime, the Bloomberg administration has some positive test scores under its belt already, including an impressive 9.9 percentage point gain for 4th graders on the state's most recent reading tests, the largest jump since the test was initiated in 1999. City tests in reading and math for 3rd, 5th, 6th, and 7th graders also posted the largest-ever one-year gains this spring. Because the single-year test-score increases raise as many questions as they answer about what is really happening in the schools, the administration is also boasting higher attendance rates in their new small high schools, a sign, they say, that students are more engaged in their schooling. In the violent schools that were labeled "Impact schools," reported crimes have dropped significantly, although concerns have been raised by teachers, principals, parents, and students about the increased role of police in schools.

These are the kinds of intrigues voters will likely consider as they decide whether or not the city's schools are better off now than they were in 2002 when the mayor gained control. It may be premature to judge Bloomberg on the results, or perhaps not. But he and Klein have surely wrestled with six big, seemingly intractable issues in the past three years:

Issue 1: Leadership

From day one, the administration has been beating the drum for the need to make sure each of the city's 1,300 schools is led by a competent and effective school principal. To start making a dent in a supply problem that plagues schools nationwide, Bloomberg and Klein turned their backs on old-school education administration programs at universities and instead opted to create a nonprofit leadership academy to train school leaders to be the kind of principals who can transform struggling schools. "Leadership is something that you have to study and train and work at," Bloomberg said in 2003, after city businesses pledged $30 million to the academy. All told, the academy set out to raise $75 million in philanthropic contributions to get the academy up and running. Former General Electric CEO Jack Welch was instrumental in creating the framework for the academy, and Klein claimed to be able to call Welch around the clock for advice on how to manage the massive school system.

The Leadership Academy enrolls about 90 aspiring principals for a 15-month crash course in school leadership. Some charge that the program, which pays those 90 future principals' salaries while they are in the academy, costs a lot considering that the city needs 300 new principals a year. But the city has also partnered with a Manhattan-based group, New Leaders for New Schools, which recruits and trains new school leaders, to add to the city's talent pool for new principals. "A little competition is good," Klein has said. The city has also worked closely with groups like Boston-based Building Excellent Schools, a nonprofit that recruits and trains charter school leaders.

Issue 2: Taming the System

How out of control were things in the New York City schools before the mayor took over? One of the first accomplishments for which Bloomberg claimed credit was delivering textbooks on time. In the past, principals said they were lucky if the books showed up by Christmas, if at all. Clear lines of accountability, from the top of the system to the classroom, were what mayoral control was supposed to bring to the city's school system, and Bloomberg recognized the symbolic importance of delivering the books on time.

Attempts to tame the system were complicated by Klein's dismantling the 32-district structure and replacing it with 10 regions. Despite considerable debate about the merits of this reorganization, particularly from parents and principals who found it difficult to get even basic information and answers from the new regional centers, Klein was emphatic that it needed to happen. "We weren't doing the job we should be doing for a large number of students," he said at the end of his first year on the job. "I don't think we have time to waste in that respect."

One way to get every school in the city working off the same page was the administration's insistence that schools scrap the hodgepodge of reading and math programs that dotted the city's landscape in favor of a common citywide curriculum. The selection of a "balanced literacy" approach for reading and Everyday Math has itself been controversial and will ultimately be judged by test scores and graduation rates years from now. Nevertheless, many educators said they found it helpful to be able to train and plan with other colleagues throughout the system who were learning to use the same new approaches. Far less popular was the administration's seeming insistence that teachers comply with silly mandates governing arrangement of desks, layout of classrooms, and the placement of their rocking chairs.

To help keep everyone on the same page, Klein added math and reading coaches to each school. Teachers at some schools reported that the coaches helped make their own professional development more meaningful and personalized, but even Klein was forced to admit too much pressure was being exerted on teachers to create perfect bulletin boards and to time their "mini-lessons" so that they didn't go beyond the accepted protocol under the new curriculum order.

Perhaps the most controversial effort to instill a sense of order in the system was Bloomberg's plan to end social promotion in 3rd (and then later 5th) grade. Bloomberg was pressured by prominent conservatives and editorial writers to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

keep students from leaving 3rd grade if they didn't know how to read and do basic math, and he complied by announcing the new plan in the middle of the 2003–04 school year. After some sloppy early implementation, the retention policy ended up being one of the most important reforms under mayoral control because it established a series of formalized intervention strategies for the lowest-performing students, including classes on weekends and holidays, and in summer school.

Issue 3: Contract Reform

Klein's independence from the teachers union has allowed him to be more outspoken than any other chancellor in the city's history about the adverse impact of the teachers' contract on school management's ability to run schools effectively and efficiently. Klein railed against what he called the three biggest problems contained in the contract and the culture the contract produces: lockstep pay for teachers, regardless of their skills or assignment; lifetime tenure, making it difficult to get rid of incompetent or abusive teachers; and seniority rights that dictate assignments based solely on a teacher's longevity in the system.

Klein has weathered a relentless barrage of attacks from the teachers union, even as he consistently called for major changes in the way teachers are paid and assigned, endorsing both merit pay and higher pay for teachers who opt to work in the most challenging schools. But the administration's micromanaging of basic classroom conditions was a turnoff to many teachers and did little to win their support for the kinds of changes Klein was seeking.

Issue 4: School Construction

One of the most shocking examples of corruption and incompetence in the city's recent school history is the mind-boggling cost of building new schools and the system's inability to do anything about overcrowding that was predicted years ago. The city's Independent Budget Office estimated in early 2002 that one reason billions of dollars' worth of school construction wasn't making a dent in the crowding issue was that it cost 400 percent more to build new schools in New York City than in other parts of the state and across the Hudson River in New Jersey. New Yorkers for many years were thus paying construction costs for four schools, but getting only one in return.

Peter Lehrer, chairman of a school commission appointed by former chancellor Harold Levy in 2001, found that it cost $425 to $450 per square foot to build a new school, far more than the $300 to $325 per square foot it takes to put up office towers, luxury condos, and hospitals in the same city. The commission noted that one reason the costs weren't lower was that no one at the School Construction Authority seemed to care how much things cost. Essentially there was no "customer" who would complain if things came in over budget. With no one keeping an eye on the cost, it was almost guaranteed that more would be spent than necessary and that efficiency was seldom an issue.

The School Construction Authority also seemed to go out of its way to be as unpleasant to work with as humanly possible. New York State's Moreland Commission in 2002 found that contractors routinely jacked up their prices by 20 percent as a sort of charge for this frustration. They even had a name for it: the "aggravation tax."

To his credit, Bloomberg made slashing school construction costs a priority once he got control of the city schools and the School Construction Authority. He insisted on better planning to reduce costly change orders and courted the biggest builders in the city, who had previously refused to work with the schools because of all the headaches involved. The result was that school officials were able to pare down the opening bids for new school construction from $433 to $300 per square foot, an important development as the city tried to make the case to state legislators that it deserved billions of dollars more each year as part of a school funding adequacy lawsuit (see Hanushek, "Pseudo-Science," p. 67).

Issue 5: New Schools

The administration has worked aggressively to increase the number of nonfailing school options for students and parents. Klein called for the creation of 50 new charter schools and raised $40 million in philanthropic contributions for his nonprofit New York City Center for Charter School Excellence. Previous chancellors tended to be outwardly hostile to competition, so the sudden embrace of charter schools surprised many supporters.

Bill Phillips, president of the New York Charter Schools Association, has called Klein "a home run for charters" and even invited the chancellor to appear as the keynote speaker for the state's annual charter school powwow in 2004. Rather than being shunned by the system, new charters have an opportunity to use underutilized space in public school buildings to get up and running. Bloomberg's five-year

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

capital plan for schools even includes funding for new charter school buildings. In addition to supporting the movement, Klein has emerged as a strong voice in the effort to lift a cap on the number of charter schools in the state legislature.

Klein has also overseen the most rapid attempts in the nation to create new, small schools, often by converting larger schools into multischool campuses. Interestingly, these new schools, supported by grants from philanthropist Bill Gates (see Colvin, "The New Philanthropists," p. 34), have attracted considerably more controversy than the charter schools, in large part because they played a role in overcrowding and friction at high schools that were not small elsewhere in the city.

Issue 6: Graduation Rates

Bloomberg and Klein tend not to be apologists for a system even they acknowledge is failing. Klein has used the city's dismal graduation statistics to rally support for the urgency behind his reforms. He repeatedly notes in his public appearances that less than 20 percent of the students who begin high school in the city go on to graduate four years later with a New York State Regents Diploma, and only about 54 percent graduate at all. "Nearly half are leaving high school with nothing," Klein said. "Knowledge powers a global economy that is utterly unforgiving to the unskilled, uneducated young adult."

While observers will judge Bloomberg and Klein's tenure using standardized test scores—and even they agree those scores are important measures—Klein has made no secret of the fact that he wishes his team's work to be marked in the end by significant upticks in both the graduation rate and the numbers of students who pass basic tests in order to qualify for a Regents diploma. That, Klein aides argue, will show that major reforms in lower grades, like the citywide curriculum and the 3rd- and 5th-grade retention policies, will have combined with reforms to middle schools and high schools to produce their desired effects.

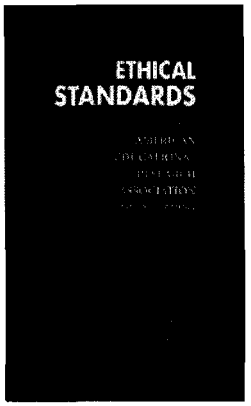
Voters will decide what they think of all this reform in November, but it could take years before the public can tell whether the foundation is as strong as Bloomberg and Klein believe.

"We're dealing with a huge, complex system," said Dennis Walcott, deputy mayor for education. "People who expect magic and change to take place in a simplistic way, I think, are fooling themselves."

Joe Williams is a staff writer on education for the New York Daily News. *He is also author of* Cheating Our Kids: How Politics and Greed Ruin Education.

Essential Reading—*THE* Educational Guide to Ethical Standards

Ethical Standards of the American Educational Research Association: Cases and Commentary



Published in 2002

Kenneth A. Strike, Melissa S. Anderson, Randall Curren, Tyll van Geel, Ivor Pritchard, and Emily Robertson

ISBN 0-935302-28-X

This indispensable 21st-century volume communicates and clarifies the central intentions of the Standards. It also explores and discusses any ambiguities in the Standards and in the broader role of code of ethics and ethical obligations.

Members who wish to order *Ethical Standards of the* American Educational Research Association: Cases and Commentary may do so at the member price of $30.
Individual nonmembers or institutions may order it for $35.
Please add $5 per item for postage and handling.

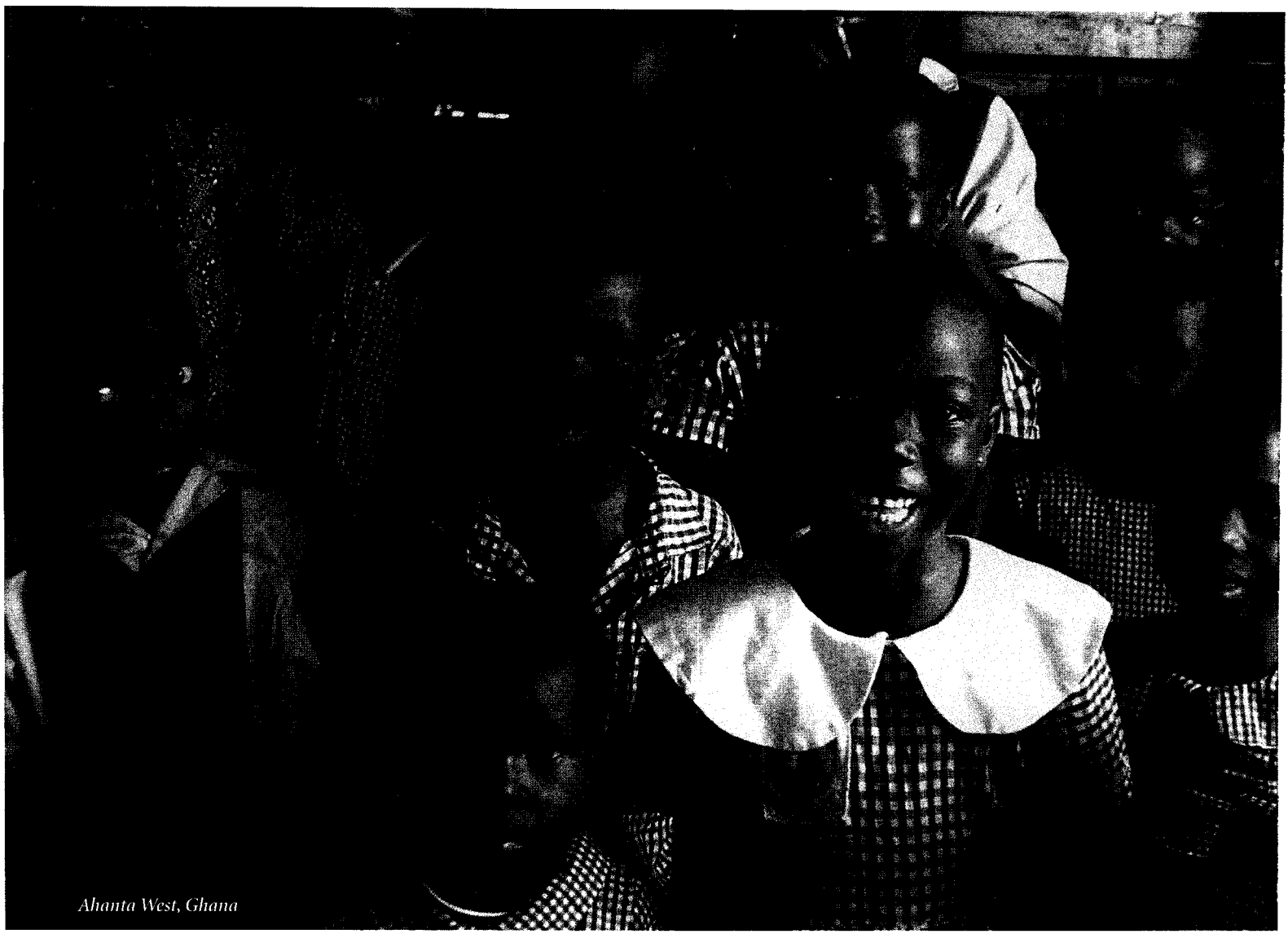
For information and to order, click on:
http://www.aera.net/publications/?id=313#ethical

No returns. Prices are subject to change without notice.

All orders must be prepaid

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Private Schools



Ahanta West, Ghana

The accepted wisdom is that private schools serve the privileged; everyone else, especially the poor, requires public school. The poor, so this logic goes, need government assistance if they are to get a good education, which helps explain why, in the United States, many school choice enthusiasts believe that the only way the poor can get the education they deserve is through vouchers or charter schools, proxies for those *better* private or independent schools, paid for with public funds.

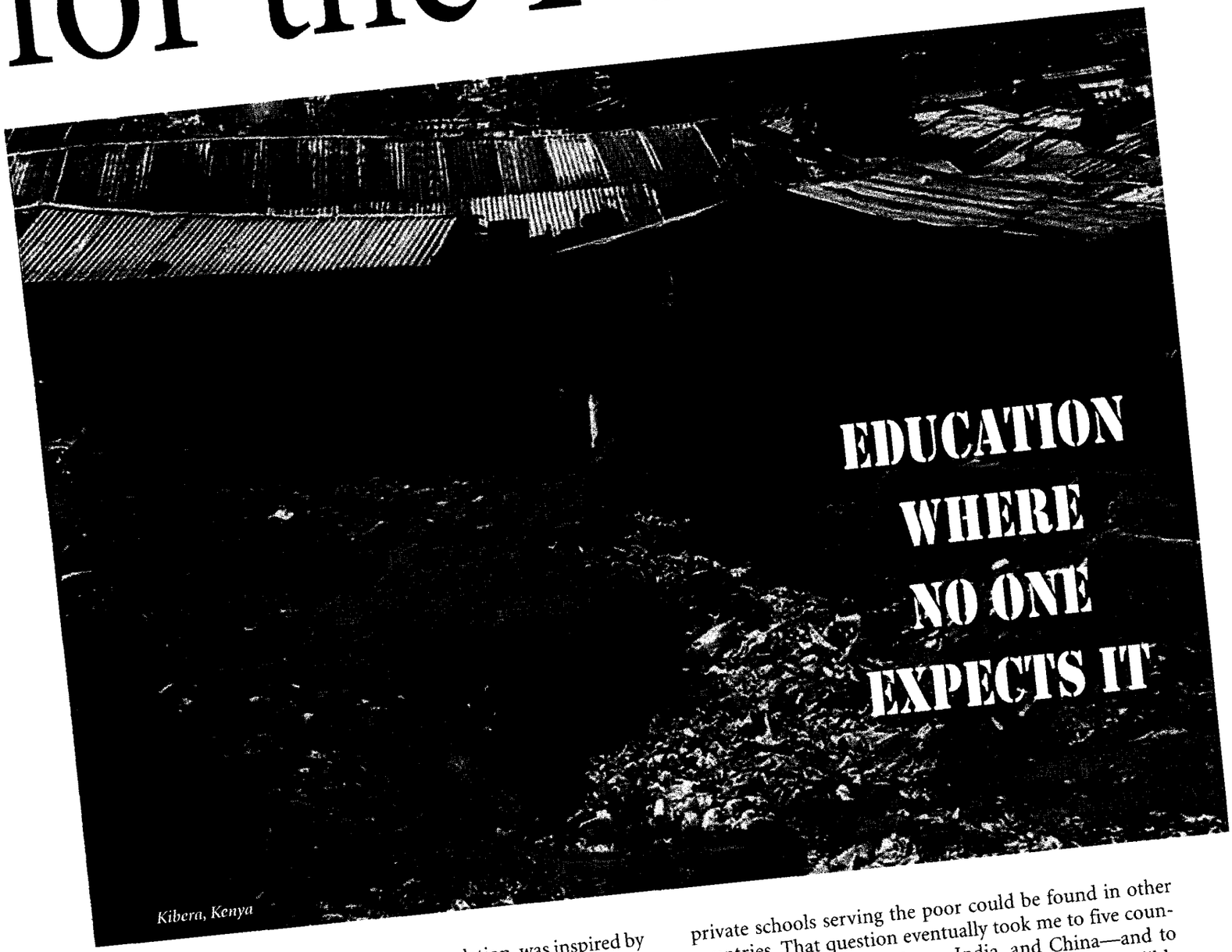
But if we reflect on these beliefs in a foreign context and observe low-income families in underprivileged and developing countries, we find these assumptions lacking: the poor have found remarkably innovative ways of helping themselves, educationally, and in some of the most destitute places on Earth have managed to nurture a large and growing industry of private schools for themselves.

For the past two years I have overseen research on such schools in India, China, and sub-Saharan Africa. The project,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the Poor

STORY & PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES TOOLEY



Kibera, Kenya

funded by the John Templeton Foundation, was inspired by a serendipitous discovery of mine while I was engaged in some consulting work for the International Finance Corporation, the private finance arm of the World Bank. Taking time off from evaluating an elite private school in Hyderabad, India, I stumbled on a crowd of private schools in slums behind the Charminar, the 16th-century tourist attraction in the central city. It was something that I had never imagined, and I immediately began to wonder whether private schools serving the poor could be found in other countries. That question eventually took me to five countries—Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, India, and China—and to dozens of different rural and urban locales, all incredibly poor. Since the data gathered from Lagos, Nigeria, and Delhi, India, are not yet fully analyzed, this article reports on findings only from Gansu Province, China; Ga, Ghana; Hyderabad, India; and Kibera, Kenya. These are in vastly different settings, but my research teams and I found large num-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bers of private schools for low-income families, many of which showed measurable achievement advantage over government schools serving equally disadvantaged students.

MYTH ONE:
Private Education for the Poor Does Not Exist

Undertaking this research was disheartening at first. In each country I visited, officials from national governments and international agencies that donate funds for the expansion of state-run education denied that private education for the poor even existed. In China senior officials told me that what I was describing was "logically impossible" because "China has achieved universal public education and universal means for the poor as well as the rich." At other times, in other places, I met with polite, if embarrassed, apologies that always went something like, "Sorry, in our country, private schools are for the privileged, not the poor."

In each venue, however, I struck out on my own and visited slums and villages and there found what I was looking for: private schools for the poor, usually in large numbers, if sometimes hidden from view. In the slums of Hyderabad, India, a typical private school would be in a converted house, in a small alleyway behind bustling and noisy streets, or above a shop. Classrooms are dark, by Western standards, with no doors hung in the doorways, and noise from the streets outside easily entering through the barred but unglazed windows. Walls are painted white, but discolored by pollution, heat, and the general wear-and-tear of the children; no pictures or work is hung on them. Children will usually be in a school uniform and sitting at rough wooden desks. Generally, there are about 25 students in a class, a decent teacher-to-student ratio, but the tiny rooms always seem crowded. Often the top floor of the building will have various construction work going on to extend the number of classrooms.

THE ACCEPTED WISDOM IS THAT PRIVATE SCHOOLS SERVE ELSE, ESPECIALLY THE POOR, REQUIRES PUBLIC SCHOOL.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The school proprietor will usually live in a couple of rooms at the back of the building.

In rural Ghana, a typical private school might consist of an open-air structure, often no more than a tin roof supported by wooden poles, on a small plot of land. To find these schools you'll have to wander down meandering narrow paths, away from the main thoroughfares, asking villagers as you go. If you ask simply for the "school," they'll send you back to the public school, usually an impressive brick building on the main road. You'll have to persist and say you want the "small" school to get directions.

In the slums of Nairobi, Kenya, private schools are made from the same materials as every other building: corrugated iron sheets or mud walls, with windows and doors cut out to allow light to enter. Floors are usually mud, roofs sometimes thatched. Children will not be in uniform and will usually be sitting on homemade wooden benches. In the dry season, the wind will blow dust through the cracks in the walls; in the rainy season, the playground will become a pond, and the classroom floors mud baths. Teaching continues, however, through most of these intemperate interruptions.

In order to conduct research in five countries from my base in Newcastle, England, I recruited teams of researchers from reputable local universities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). While fielding the research crews, I visited dozens of likely study sites, always in low-income areas, and always found private schools for the poor. I also visited government offices to gain permission to conduct the research. In the end, all of the chosen countries, apart from China, were rated by the Oxfam Education Report as countries where education needs were not being met by government systems. Though China is ranked relatively high on the Oxfam index, we wanted to include it in our study because of the dramatic political and economic changes there in the past several decades. (Because of the threat of SARS, however, our first research team spent a long period in quarantine and thus our research there is not yet complete.) Other countries were chosen for a mixture of practical and substantive reasons.

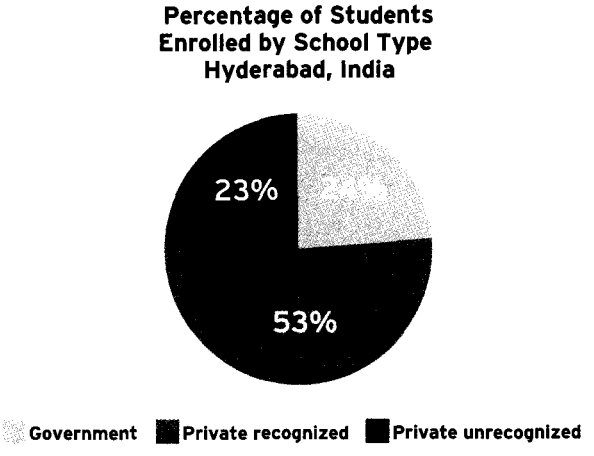
THE PRIVILEGED; EVERYONE

I was particularly interested in Kenya, where free elementary education had just been introduced to much acclaim. How would this affect private schools for the poor, should they exist? I had conducted research earlier in Hyderabad, India, was familiar with the terrain, and had many contacts in government and the private sector, so it seemed sensible to continue the project there. And because of a chance meeting with the

Under the Radar

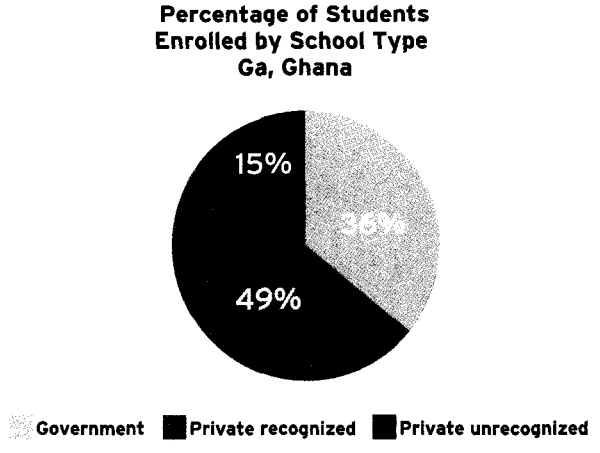
A substantial percentage of students in both Hyderabad, India, and Ga, Ghana, attends private schools that are unrecognized by their respective governments. This means that "official" figures, which include only enrollment data for recognized private and government schools, dramatically understate the true number of students attending schools in these regions.

(Figure 1)



SOURCE: Author's calculations based on original research and local government figures.

(Figure 2)



SOURCE: Author's calculations based on original research and local government figures.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ghanaian minister of education at a conference in Italy, we were invited to that western African nation.

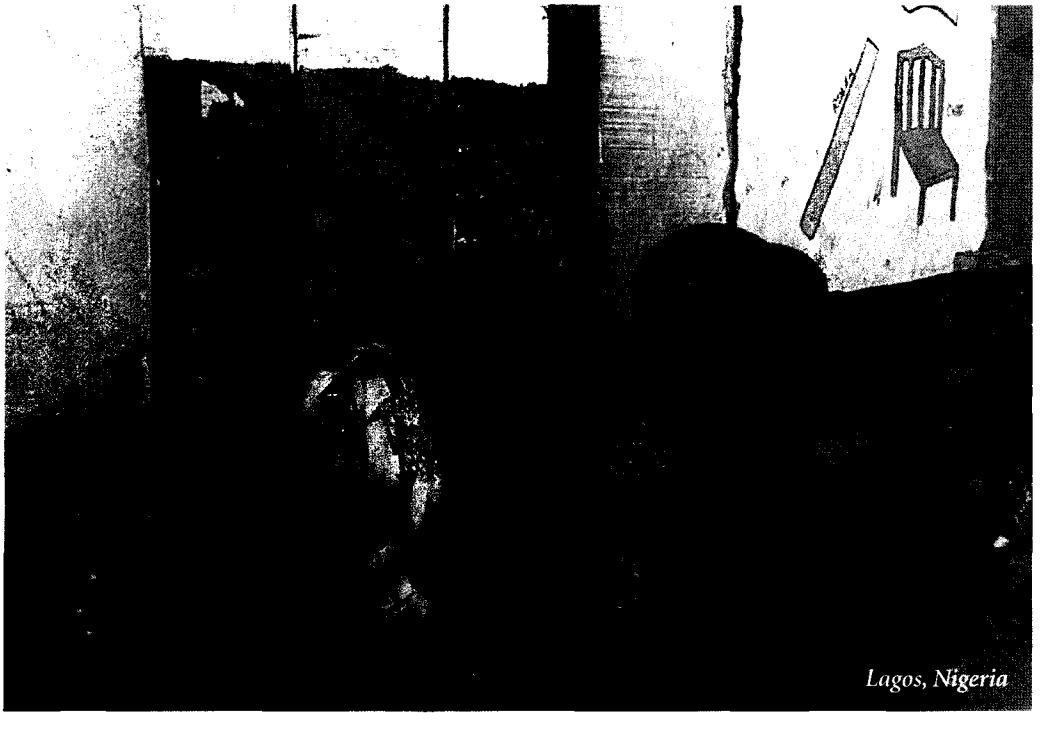
Many difficulties emerged that I had not taken account of as the project progressed. Heavy rains prevented the research teams from moving around in both Ghana and Nigeria for weeks at a time; intense heat delayed work for days in Hyderabad; early snowfalls hampered movement in the mountains of China. But above all, a major difficulty was getting the extended research teams to take seriously the notion that we really were interested in the low-key, unobtrusive private schools that apparently were easily dismissed. In each of the settings, on unannounced quality control visits, I found unrecognized private schools that had not been reported by the teams.

Hyderabad, India

Visit the ultramodern high-rise development of "High Tech City" and you'll see why Hyderabad dubs itself "Cyberabad," proud of its position at the forefront of India's technological revolution. But cross the river Musi and enter the Old City, with once magnificent buildings dating to the 16th century and earlier, and you'll see the congested India, with narrow streets weaving their way through crowded markets and densely populated slums. For our survey, we canvassed three zones in the Old City (Bandlaguda, Bhadurpura, and Charminar), with a population of about 800,000 (about 22 percent of all of Hyderabad), covering an area of some 19 square miles. We included only schools that were found in "slums," as determined by the latest available census and Hyderabad municipal guides, areas that lacked amenities such as indoor plumbing, running water, electricity, and paved roads.

In these areas alone our team found 918 schools: 35 percent were government run; 23 percent were private schools that had official recognition by the government ("recognized"); and, incredibly, 37 percent slipped under the government radar ("unrecognized"). The last group is, in effect, a black market in education, operating entirely without both state funding *and* regulation. (The remaining 5 percent were private schools that received a 100 percent state subsidy for teachers' salaries, making them public schools in all but name.) In terms of total student enrollment in the slum areas of the three zones, with 918 schools, 76 percent of all schoolchildren attended either recognized or unrecognized private schools, with roughly the same percentage of children in the unrecognized private schools as in government schools (see Figure 1).

What is clear from our research is that these private schools are not mom-and-pop day-care centers or living-room home schools. The average unrecognized school had about 8 teachers and 170 children, two-thirds in rented buildings of the type described above. The average recognized school was larger and usually situated in a more comfortable building, with 18 teachers and about 490 children. Another key difference between the recognized and unrecognized schools is that the former have stood the test of time in the education market: 40 percent of unrecognized schools were less than 5 years old, while only 5 percent of recognized schools were this new. Finally, tuition in these schools is very low, averaging about $2.12 per month in recognized private schools at 1st grade and $1.51 in unrecognized schools.



Lagos, Nigeria

While these fees seem extremely low, they must be measured against the average income of each person in the student's household who is working for pay. For students in unrecognized schools, this was about $23 per month,

IN CHINA ... THREE POOREST

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

compared with about $30 per month for students in recognized schools and $17 for government schools. Since the official minimum wage in Hyderabad is $46 per month, it is clear that the families in the private schools we observed are poor. Fees amount to about 7 percent of average monthly earnings in a typical household using a private unrecognized school. For the poorest children, the schools provide scholarships or subsidized places: 7 percent of children paid no tuition and 11 percent paid reduced fees. In effect, the poor are subsidizing the poorest.

Zhai Zi Chuan, China

Ga, Ghana

The Ga district of southern Ghana, which surrounds the country's capital city of Accra, is classified by the Ghana Statistical Service as a low-income, urban periphery, and rural area. With a population of about 500,000, Ga includes poor fishing villages along the coast, subsistence farms inland, and large dormitory towns for workers serving the industries and businesses of Accra itself. Most of the district lacks basic social amenities such as potable water, sewage systems, electricity, and paved roads. In Ga's towns and villages our researchers found a total of 799 schools, 25 percent of which were government, 52 percent recognized private, and 23 percent unrecognized private. In total, 33,134 children were found in unrecognized private schools, or about 15 percent of children enrolled in school (see Figure 2).

THE MAJORITY OF THE PRIVATE SCHOOLS FOUND WERE IN THE REGIONS OF GANSU, WHERE AVERAGE NET INCOME PER YEAR RANGES FROM $125 TO $166.

The average monthly fee for an unrecognized private school in Ga is about $4 for the early elementary grades, about $7 in recognized schools. With a minimum wage of about $33 per month in the area, monthly fees in the private unrecognized schools are thus about 12 percent of the average monthly earnings of an adult earner. However, many of the poorest schools allow a daily fee to be paid so that, for instance, a poor fisherman could send his daughter to school on the days he had funds and allow her to make up for the days she missed. Such flexibility is not possible in the public schools, where full payment of the "levies" is required before the term starts. (Fees for "public" schools are common in many countries throughout the Third World, especially at high-school level. Thus the cost of private schools, we found, can sometimes be less than that of government ones.)

Unlike India, where there are restrictions on private-school ownership (private schools must be owned by a society or trust), in Ga the vast majority of private schools (82 percent of recognized and 93 percent of unrecognized) are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

run by individual proprietors; most of the rest are owned and managed by charitable organizations. Sometimes, as is common in other African countries, such schools rent church buildings or use Christian-related names, but only in a few cases are the schools run by churches. Often it is the school that subsidizes the church rather than the other way around!

Gansu, China

With 25.3 million people spread out over an area the size of Texas, Gansu province is a remote and mountainous region situated on the upper and middle reaches of the Yellow River in northwest China. It has an average elevation of over 3,000 feet and 75 percent of its population is rural, with illiteracy rates among people aged 15 or older at nearly 20 percent for men and 40 percent for women. Roughly half of its counties, with 62 percent of the population, are considered "impoverished."

Figures from the Provincial Education Bureau show only 44 private schools in the whole province, all of which are for privileged city dwellers. Given the paucity of information on private schools, I asked my research teams to survey each major town in each of the counties designated as impoverished (more than 40 of them) and to visit as many of the outlying villages accessible to them as they could. In the early stages I wasn't worried about getting precise estimates of the numbers of schools or the proportion of children in them, but rather wanted to see if such schools even existed.

In the major towns and the larger villages, all of them crowded and bustling, there is always a public school, usually a fine two-story building that sports a plaque marking it as a recipient of some kind of foreign aid. But researchers had to abandon their cars and either walk or hitch a ride on one of the ubiquitous and noisy three-wheeled farm vehicles to travel up the steeper mountain paths to clusters of houses in smaller villages to find the private schools. And there, nestled on mountain ridges, were stone or brick houses converted to schools, with the proprietor or headmaster living with his family in one or two of its rooms. Occasionally, the school had been built, by the villagers, to be used as a school. Over and over again, researchers followed these trails high into the arid mountains and, in the end, discovered a total of 696 private schools, 593 of them serving some 61,000 children in the most remote villages.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of Gansu's private schools were set up by individuals, or the villages themselves, because government schools are simply too far away or hard to get to. Significantly, the majority of the private schools found were in the three poorest regions of Gansu, where average net income per year ranges from $125 to $166. These private schools are serving some of the poorest people on the planet. But surprisingly, the schools, which depend on tuition, are also cheaper than government schools. Average fees for a first-year, elementary-school student are about $7.60 per semester, compared with about $8.00 in the public schools, not an insignificant difference to someone living on $125 per year.

Kibera, Kenya

In Kenya we conducted our censuses in three urban slums of Nairobi (Kibera, Mukuru, and Kawangware), where, according to Kenyan government officials, there were no private schools. The picture in each was similar; here I describe the findings for Kibera only.

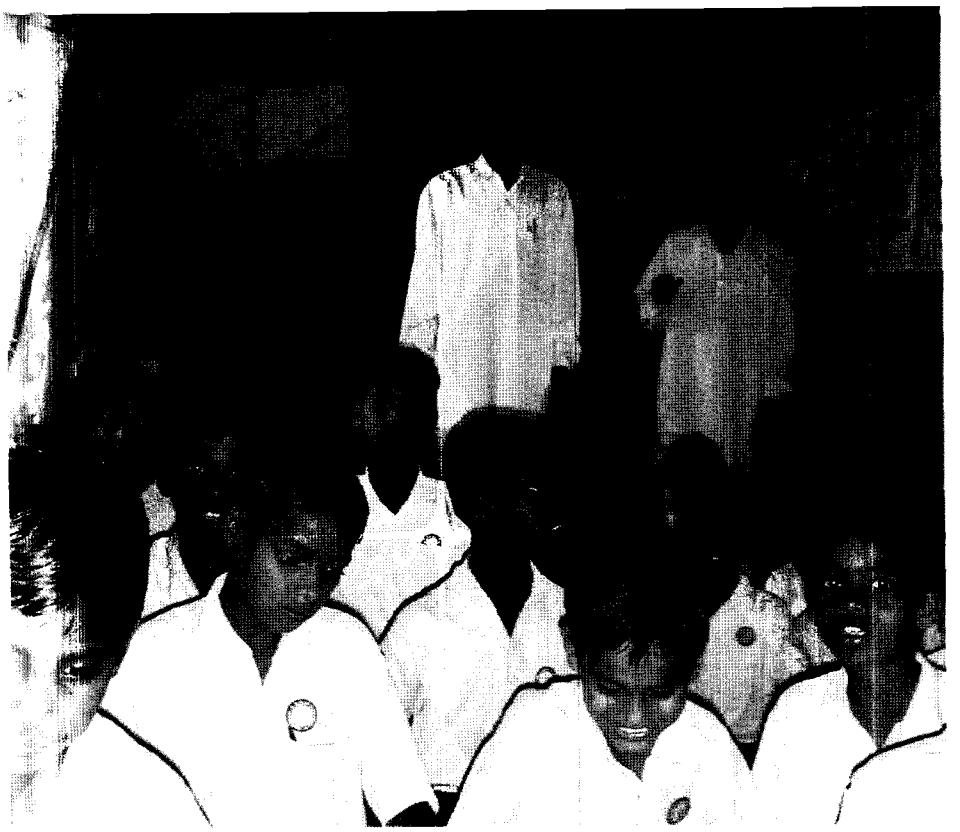
The largest slum in all of sub-Saharan Africa, Kibera has, according to various estimates, anywhere from 500,000 to 800,000 people crowded into an area of about 630 acres, smaller than Manhattan's Central Park. Mud-walled, corrugated iron-roofed settlements huddle along the old Uganda Railway for several miles and crowd along steep narrow mud tracks until Kibera reaches the posh suburbs. In Nairobi's two rainy seasons, the mud tracks become mud baths. In this setting, we found 76 private elementary and high schools, enrolling more than 12,000 students. The schools are typically run by local entrepreneurs, a third of whom are women who have seen the possibility of making a living from running a school. Again, many of the schools offered free places to the poorest, including orphans.

When I first visited Kibera, many private-school proprietors were feeling the effects of so-called Free Primary Education (FPE), introduced by the Kenyan government in January 2003 with great fanfare and a $55 million grant from the World Bank. In fact, when asked by ABC anchorman Peter Jennings which one living person he would most like to meet, former president Bill Clinton told a prime-time television audience that it was President Mwai Kibaki of Kenya, "Because he has abolished school fees," which "would affect more lives than any president had done or would ever do by the end of this year." Indeed, official sources estimated that an extra 1.3 million children would be enrolled in public schools after the introduction of FPE: all of them children, it was said, not previously enrolled in school.

The reality may be very different. Private-school owners in Kibera alone reported a total enrollment decline of some 6,500 after Free Primary Education was initiated; some schools closed altogether. We estimated that about 4,500 children had been enrolled in 25 schools that we confirmed had closed as a result of FPE. At the same time five government primary schools on the periphery of Kibera that served the slums reported a total increase of only about 3,300 children during this period. That is, since the introduction of free elementary education, there appeared to have been a net decline in attendance of nearly 8,000 children from one slum alone! Clearly, these figures are based on the reported decline

"EDUCATION "WHAT WE LOVE THE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



by school owners and may be exaggerated. But they also suggest the possibility that government and international intervention had the effect of crowding out private enterprise.

MYTH TWO:
Private Education for the Poor Is Low Quality

It is a common assumption among development experts that private schools for the poor are worse than public schools. This is not to say that they have a particularly high view of public education. Indeed, the World Bank's *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People* calls public education a "government failure," with "services so defective that their opportunity costs outweigh their benefits for most poor people." Yet this just makes the experts' dismissal of private schools for the poor all the more inexplicable.

The *Oxfam Education Report* published in 2000 is typical. While the author acknowledges the existence of high-quality private providers, he contends that these are elite, well-resourced schools that are inaccessible to the poor. As far as private schools for the poor are concerned, these are of "inferior quality"; indeed, they "offer a low-quality service" that is so bad it will "restrict children's future opportunities." This claim of low-quality private provision for the poor has also been taken up by British prime minister Tony Blair's Commission for Africa, which recently reported that although "Non-state sectors ... have historically provided much education in Africa," many of these private schools "aiming at those [families] who cannot afford the fees common in state schools ... are without adequate state regulation and are of a low quality."

However, these development experts have little hard evidence for their assertions about private-school quality. They instead point out that private schools employ untrained teachers who are paid much less than their government counterparts and that buildings and facilities are grossly inadequate. Both of these observations are largely true. But does that mean that private schools are inferior, particularly against the weight of parental preferences to the contrary? One Ghanaian school owner challenged me when I observed that her school building was little more than a corrugated iron roof on rickety poles and that the government school, just a few hundred yards away, was a smart new school building. "Education is not about buildings," she scolded. "What matters is what is in the teacher's heart. In our hearts, we love the children and do our best for them." She left it open, when probed, what the teachers in the government school felt in their hearts toward the poor children.

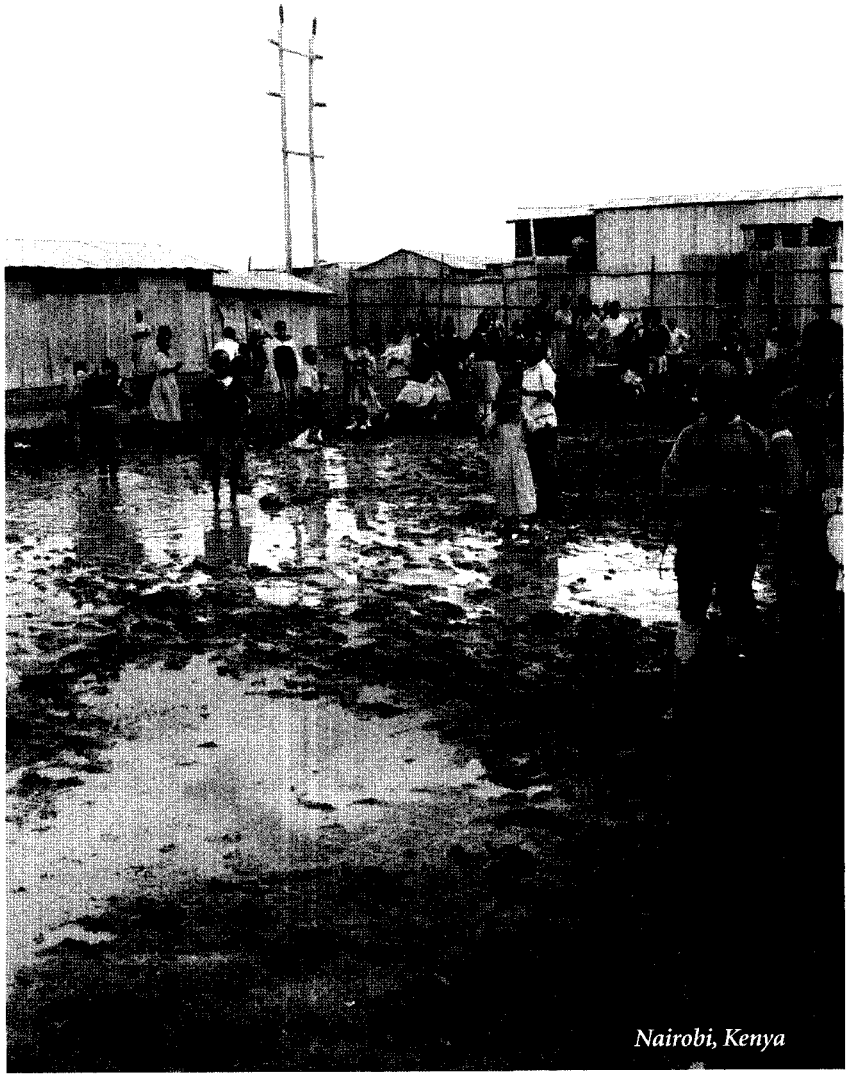
Facilities and Resources

The issue of the relative quality of private and public schools was at the core of our research, and we relied on both data on school resources and day-to-day operations and on student achievement scores. Our researchers first called unannounced at schools and asked for a tour, noted what teachers were doing, made an inventory of facilities, and administered detailed questionnaires.

Certainly, in some countries the facilities in the private schools were markedly inferior to those in the public schools. In China, where the researchers were asked to locate a public school in the village nearest to where they had found a private school, often many miles away, private-school facilities were

IS NOT ABOUT BUILDINGS," SHE SCOLDED. MATTERS IS WHAT IS IN THE TEACHER'S HEART. IN OUR HEARTS, CHILDREN AND DO OUR BEST FOR THEM."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Nairobi, Kenya

generally worse than in those publicly provided. This was predictable, given that the private schools undercut the public ones in fees and served the poorest villages, where there were no public schools. In Gansu province, desks were available in classrooms in 88 percent of private schools, compared with 97 percent of public schools; 66 percent of private schools had chairs or benches in classrooms, compared with 76 percent of public schools. In Kenya, parallel results would be expected, given that the private schools surveyed were located in the slums, while the public schools were on the periphery, accommodating both poor and middle-class children. However, given that there were only 5 government schools on the periphery of Kibera, but 76 private schools within the slum, statistical comparisons would make little sense.

In Hyderabad, however, on *every* input, including the provision of blackboards, playgrounds, desks, drinking water, toilets, and separate toilets for boys and girls, both types of private schools, recognized and unrecognized, were superior to the government schools. While only 78 percent of the government schools had blackboards in every classroom, the figures were 96 percent and 94 percent for private recognized and unrecognized schools, respectively. In only half the government schools were toilets provided for children, compared with 100 percent and 96 percent of the recognized and unrecognized private schools.

Finally, in Ghana, the picture is mixed. For instance, 95 percent of government schools in Ga had playgrounds, compared with 66 percent and 82 percent of private unrecognized and recognized schools, respectively. Desks were provided in 97 percent of government schools, but only in 61 percent of private unrecognized; recognized private schools provided them in 92 percent of cases. However, only 54 percent of government schools provided drinking water to children compared with 63 percent of private unrecognized and 87 percent of private recognized schools. And 63 percent of government schools provided toilets, compared with 91 percent of recognized but only 59 percent of unrecognized private schools. A library was provided in 8 percent of government, 7 percent of private unrecognized schools, but 27 percent of private recognized schools. At least one computer for the use of children was provided in only 3 percent of government schools, but in 12 percent of private unrecognized and 37 percent of private recognized.

When it came to the key question of whether or not teaching was going on in the classrooms, both types of private schools were superior to the public schools, except in China, where there was no statistically significant difference between the two school types: 92 percent of teachers in private schools were teaching when our researchers arrived, compared with 89 percent in the public schools. When researchers called unannounced on the classrooms in Hyderabad, 98 percent of

IN HYDERABAD, THE PROVISION OF BLACKBOARDS, PLAYGROUNDS, DESKS, DRINKING WATER, TOILETS, AND SEPARATE TOILETS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS WERE SUPERIOR TO THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS.

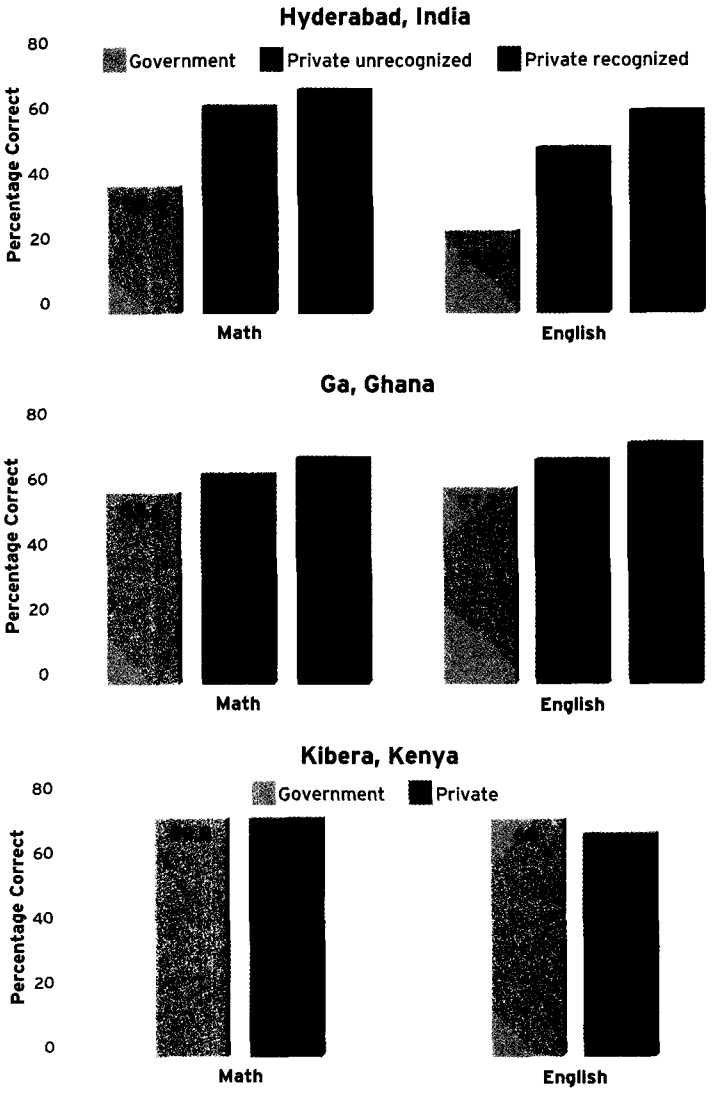
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

teachers were teaching in the private recognized schools, compared with 91 percent in the unrecognized and 75 percent in the government schools. Teacher absenteeism was also highest in the government schools. In Ga, 57 percent of teachers were teaching in government schools, compared with 66 percent and 75 percent in unrecognized and recognized private schools, respectively. And in Kibera, even though the number of government schools is too small to make statistical comparisons meaningful, 74 percent of teachers were teaching in private schools when our researchers visited them, and only one teacher was absent.

It was also the case that private and public schools in China had more or less the same pupil-teacher ratio, about 25:1. In Hyderabad, private schools, including the unrecognized ones, had significant advantages over the government schools: the average pupil-teacher ratio was 42:1 in government schools compared with only 22:1 in the unrecognized and 27:1 in the recognized private schools. In Ga the pupil-teacher ratio was superior in private schools, with a ratio of 29:1 in government, compared with 21:1 and 20:1 in unrecognized and recognized private schools, respectively.

A Private Success (Figure 3)

As indicated by the test scores of 5th graders, private-school students are outperforming their government-school peers in Ga, Ghana, and Hyderabad, India. In Kenya, the two groups are scoring at about the same level.



SOURCE: Author's calculations based on original research and local government figures

Student Achievement

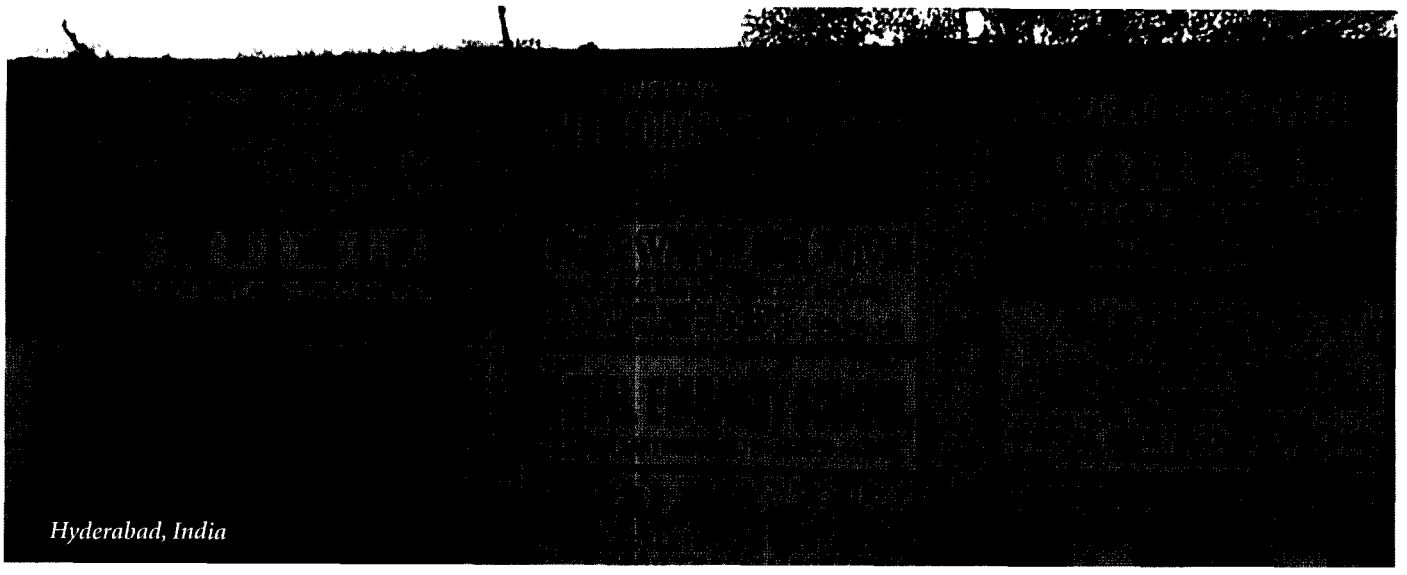
To compare the achievement of students in public and private schools in each location where we conducted research, we first grouped schools by size and management type: government, private unrecognized, and private recognized in Ga and Hyderabad; government and private in Kibera, where the private schools are all of a similar type. (China is not discussed here because research there is continuing.) As noted above, in Ga and Hyderabad we were comparing public and private schools that were located in similar, low-income areas, while in Kibera, private schools served only slum children, and public schools served middle-class children as well as slum children. But this makes the comparisons in Kenya even more dramatic. Although serving the most disadvantaged population in the region, Kibera's private schools outperformed the public schools in our study, after controlling for background variables.

We tested a total of roughly 3,000 students in each setting in English and mathematics; in state languages in India and Kenya; religious and moral education in Ghana; and social studies in Nigeria. All children were also given IQ tests, as were their teachers. Finally, questionnaires were distributed to children, their parents, teachers, and school managers, seeking information on family backgrounds.

Our analysis of these data is still in progress. However, in all cases analyzed so far—Ga, Hyderabad, and Kibera—students in private schools achieved at or above the levels achieved by their counterparts in government schools in both English and mathematics (see Figure 3).

Moreover, the private-school advantage only increases with consideration of the differences in an unusually rich array of characteristics of the students, their families' economic status, and the resources available at their schools. In Hyderabad, students attending recognized and unrecognized private schools outperformed their peers in government schools by a full standard deviation in both English and math (after accounting for differences in their observable characteristics). In Ghana, the adjusted private-school advantage was between

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Hyderabad, India

0.2 and 0.3 standard deviations in both subjects. Finally, in Kenya, where the raw test scores showed students in private and public schools performing at similar levels, the fact that private schools served a far more disadvantaged population resulted in a gap of 0.1 standard deviations in English and 0.2 standard deviations in math (after accounting for differences in student characteristics). The adjusted differences between the performance of public and private sectors in each setting were highly statistically significant.

In short, it is not the case that private schools serving low-income families are inferior to those provided by the state. In all cases analyzed, even the unrecognized schools, those that are dismissed by the development experts as being obviously of poor quality seem to outperform their public counterparts.

Lessons for America

So the accepted wisdom appears to be wrong. Though elite private schools do exist in impoverished regions of the world, private schools are not only for the privileged classes. From a wide range of settings, from deepest rural China, through the slums of urban India and Kenya, to the urban periphery areas of Ghana, private education is serving huge numbers of children. Indeed, in those areas where we were able to adequately compare public and private provision, a large majority of schoolchildren are in private school, a significant number of them in unrecognized schools and not on the state's radar at all.

Ironically, perhaps, the accepted wisdom does seem to be right on one point: private *is* better than public. Of course, no one suspected that private slum schools would be better. Yet our research suggests that children in these schools outperform similar students in government schools in key school subjects. And this is true even of the unrecognized private schools, schools that development experts dismiss, if they acknowledge their existence at all, as being of poor quality.

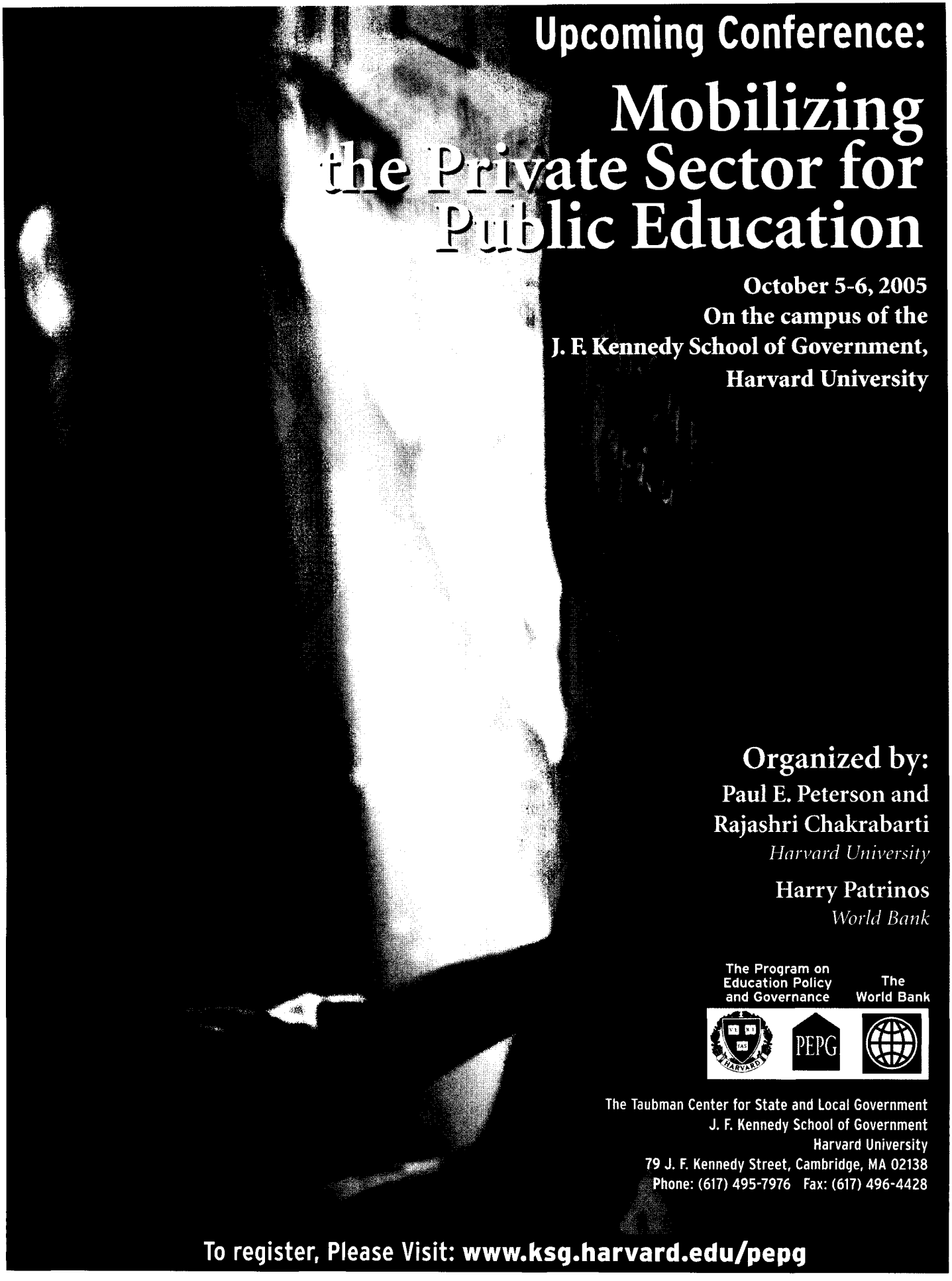
Clearly the evidence presented here may have implications for the continuing policy discussions over how to achieve universal education worldwide and for American development policy, especially programs of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank. William Easterly, in his *Elusive Quest for Growth* (see also "Barren Land," Fall 2002), notes the ineffectiveness of past investments in public schools by the international agencies and developing country governments, pointing out: "Administrative targets for universal primary education do not in themselves create the incentives for investing in the future that matter for growth," that is, in quality education. If the World Bank and USAID could find ways to invest in private schools, then genuine education improvement could result. Strategies to be considered include offering loans to help schools improve their infrastructure or worthwhile teacher training, or creating partial vouchers to help even more of the poor gain access to the private schools that are ready to take them on.

But does the evidence have any implications for the school choice debate in America itself? The evidence from developing countries might challenge the claim, made by school choice opponents, that the poor in America cannot make sensible and informed choices if school choice is offered to them. It may also stimulate debate about whether public intervention crowds out private initiative, a question raised by the findings from Kenya. If a public school is failing in the ghettoes of New York or Los Angeles, we should not assume that the only way in which the disadvantaged can be helped is through some kind of public intervention. In fact, we have already embarked on programs that support private initiative, with government support, with vouchers and charter schools. The findings here suggest this alternative approach may be the preferable one.

Above all, the evidence should inspire those who are working for school choice in America: stories of parents' overcoming all the odds to ensure the best for the children in Africa and Asia, stories of education entrepreneurs' creating schools out of nothing, in the middle of nowhere. If India can, why can't we?

James Tooley is professor of education policy, the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, England. *This essay is supported by a grant from the John M. Templeton Foundation.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Upcoming Conference:

Mobilizing the Private Sector for Public Education

October 5-6, 2005
On the campus of the
J. F. Kennedy School of Government,
Harvard University

Organized by:

Paul E. Peterson and
Rajashri Chakrabarti
Harvard University

Harry Patrinos
World Bank

The Program on Education Policy and Governance

The World Bank

The Taubman Center for State and Local Government
J. F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University
79 J. F. Kennedy Street, Cambridge, MA 02138
Phone: (617) 495-7976 Fax: (617) 496-4428

To register, Please Visit: www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The New philanthropists

Can Their Millions Enhance Learning?

BY

RICHARD LEE COLVIN

Last February, in a speech in Washington, D.C. that drew 45 of the nation's governors as well as a hefty sample of the nation's education policy elite, Microsoft chairman Bill Gates issued a jeremiad on the state of the American high school, arguing that this venerable institution is obsolete and a threat to the nation's economic and political well-being. Declarations that public education in general and high schools in particular turn out badly prepared graduates, perpetuate inequities, and generally operate in ways that run counter to the nation's interests have become almost commonplace. But coming from Gates, whose prodigious wealth and aggressive tactics have become one of the nation's best-known narratives of entrepreneurship, the words took on new meaning. Stories in the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, and many other newspapers, most written not by education reporters but by Washington-based political and legislative correspondents, reported Gates's assertions in an unquestioning, almost awestruck tone that made one thing clear: if high schools are bad enough for Bill Gates to declare them a disaster, then it must be so.

It was publicity that even the world's richest man could not buy.

But Gates's standing to speak authoritatively on the issue rested on more than his wealth, celebrity, and business acumen, or even his company's need to hire well-trained workers. Through the efforts of his richly endowed Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Gates has become an unparalleled force who is not only sounding the alarm about America's high schools, but is also putting forth, and financing, a range of specific solutions. Since 2002, the Gates Foundation has allocated more than $1.2 billion toward creating about 820 new high schools and breaking down about 750 large, comprehensive high schools into smaller, more focused, more intimate academies that aim to send far more students off to college prepared to succeed. The foundation is also the lead partner in a $125 million experiment in "early college" high schools, which are designed to enable 9th graders to get their high-school diplomas as well as two years of college credit, all within four or five years. To increase the impact of its initiatives, the Gates Foundation has involved 13 other foundations and is working with more than one hundred intermediary organizations in two hundred cities located in almost every state. The foundation's goal is ambitious: to improve the national graduation rate to at least 80 percent,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ILLUSTRATION BY SANDY HAIGHT

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from about 65 percent, while increasing the likelihood that all high-school graduates are college-ready. So, more spending, in more places, is likely on the way.

The Money Pours In

American philanthropy, by local and national foundations, corporations, and wealthy individuals, has played many important roles in K–12 education: creating new schools, underwriting research, funding scholarships, testing hypotheses, generating new curricula, invoking ideals, setting agendas, bolstering training, and building a case for policy changes. Foundation money is so widespread, and so sought after, that few in education are unaffected. Indeed, institutions with which both this author and this journal are affiliated receive support from several foundations mentioned here.

Typically, about 25 percent of philanthropic dollars goes to education, although more goes to higher education than to elementary and secondary schools.

Nothing about this is new. Thousands of schools for African American students across the Jim Crow South were built with the backing of the Rosenwald Fund, one of the earliest and most important foundations in education; philanthropist Grace Dodge founded Teachers College, now at Columbia University, in 1887, which led to training of teachers in pedagogy; the Ford Foundation was involved in promoting the employment of classroom aides, National Merit Scholarships, and the development of Advanced Placement curricula and tests; the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards grew out of work funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York, which also funded the Educational Testing Service to develop objective ways of measuring academic merit, which led to the SAT. More recently, Ford and the Rockefeller Foundation supported the work that led to equity lawsuits, dramatically altering how schools are funded in many states. Even if the $1.5 billion that philanthropists spend on K–12 education is paltry compared with the $450 billion annual price tag for the system as a whole, all of these are examples of the huge impact that well-placed philanthropy dollars can have (see Figure 1).

Even though some foundations have reduced their involvement in K–12 education or shifted their education investment to prekindergarten or afterschool programs, far more philanthropists are entering the scene than are leaving, says Bill Porter, executive director of Grantmakers for Education.

Indeed, according to the Future of Philanthropy project, an analysis done by a Cambridge, Massachusetts, consulting group, the number of foundations involved in education is expected to swell. Over the next two decades, Americans will pass on to their heirs huge sums, approximately $1.7 trillion of which will go to charities and to endow foundations. And, typically, about 25 percent of philanthropic dollars goes to education, although more goes to higher education than to elementary and secondary schools. Gates, just to use one example, has a personal net worth estimated by *Forbes* magazine to be $46 billion, and he has vowed to give away 95 percent of his assets during his lifetime.

The New Philanthropists

Plenty of other heavyweights in the world of business are contributing heavily to education causes already. They include Jim Barksdale, the former chief operating officer of Netscape, who gave $100 million to establish an institute to improve reading instruction in Mississippi; Eli Broad, the home builder and retirement investment titan, whose foundation works on a range of management, governance, and leadership issues; Michael Dell, the founder of Dell Computers, whose family foundation is valued at $1.2 billion and is a major supporter of a program that boosts college going among students of potential but middling accomplishment; financier and buyout specialist Theodore J. Forstmann, who gave $50 million of his own money to help poor kids attend private schools; David Packard, a former classics professor who also is a scion of one of the founders of Hewlett-Packard and has given $75 million to help California school districts improve reading instruction; and the Walton Family Foundation, which benefits from the fortune of the founder of Wal-Mart, and which is the nation's largest supporter of charter schools and private school scholarships (see "A Tribute to John Walton," p. 5).

As is clear from this partial list, many of the newcomers are in the West, or otherwise far from the old-money power centers of the East. A number of the individual donors did not come from money, but attended public schools before amassing their fortunes. As a group, they share a belief that public education has not done well by immigrants or poor students, hardly a radical claim. But they are less likely than were donors in the past to think that the solution to that problem lies solely or even primarily in spending more money or even in making the allocation of resources more equitable, which has been a common thread in work that many better-established foundations have pursued.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The San Francisco-based Pisces Foundation, for example, was endowed by Donald Fisher, founder and chairman emeritus of the Gap clothing chain, and his wife, Doris. By 2005 Pisces was the biggest single supporter of Teach for America, a nonprofit that has, improbably, made teaching in poverty-ridden urban schools one of the most popular career choices of students at Ivy League colleges. Pisces also gave about $35 million to fund the national expansion of the instructionally demanding Knowledge Is Power Program charter schools, which serve mostly low-income students. Overall, the foundation is spending about $20 million a year to "leverage change in public education—especially in schools serving disadvantaged students—through large strategic investments in a small number of initiatives that bolster student achievement." That rate of spending was about the same as that of the venerable Carnegie Corporation and would have put the foundation in the top ten or so givers to K–12 in 2002. (See Table 1).

Like Fisher, other new philanthropists tend to believe that schools, in addition to securing adequate financial resources, need to embrace accountability and to overhaul basic functions. Many are personally involved in overseeing the grants they give and they insist on results from educators and schools. They believe good leadership, effective management, compensation based on performance, competition, the targeting of resources, and accountability for results can all pay dividends for education as well as for foundations. They tend to set ambitious goals for their own work and to be aggressive in pursuit of their agendas. That, too, is something of a departure for philanthropists, who have tended to stay in the background and let their grantees set their own goals while they bask in the spotlight.

"These are people who made money challenging the status quo," says Barry Munitz, president and CEO of the J. Paul Getty Trust, referring to the new givers. "These high net worth, first-generation folks...approach their gift-giving the way they approached their investing—due diligence, measures of accountability, a lot of involvement, each with an agenda. It's very different from spending money on the system and standing back and letting it work."

But it's not always easy for foundations to manage the tradeoffs between aggressively pushing school districts in a certain direction and respecting the wishes of a community and its leadership; between demanding quick results and acknowledging the complexity of school reform and the intransigence of bureaucracies; between investing in something new and injecting operating resources into a project already under way. In thinking about these dilemmas, many in the philanthropic world continue to cite the 1993 Annenberg Challenge as an example of what they want to avoid.

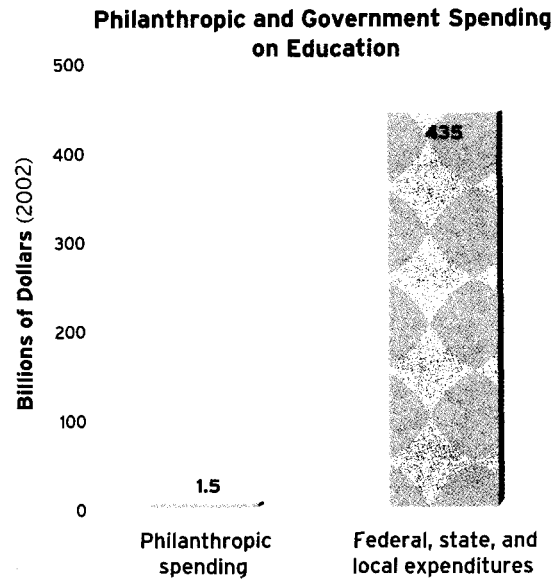
The $500 million challenge issued by former ambassador and publishing mogul Walter Annenberg is still the largest philanthropic gift ever given to American public education. After being matched by more than $600 million in goods and services from the local communities that were recipients, the money was given to nine large city school systems, a consortium of rural schools, and two national school-reform groups, among others. In some ways, the amount of money involved was both too much and too little. Some have said the money was doled out with far too little oversight by the foundation. But others contend that, in the foundation's effort to affect a number of communities, its impact was diluted.

"We spread ourselves too thin," remarked Harold Williams, president emeritus of the J. Paul Getty Trust and a board member of the Los Angeles organization that was spawned by the Annenberg grant. "If we had taken on fewer school families and focused our dollars and human resources on those, we would have accomplished more."

Guilbert C. Hentschke, dean of the school of education at the University of Southern California, one of the main partners in the challenge, is now studying the impact of philanthropy on education. He says that the Annenberg grant met "the

A Grain of Salt (Figure 1)

Even if philanthropic foundations allocate their funds effectively, it remains unclear whether reform in the multibillion-dollar public-education enterprise can be achieved with annual philanthropic expenditures of $1.5 billion.



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau; Jay Greene, "Buckets into the Sea: Why Philanthropy Isn't Changing Schools, and How It Could," prepared for American Enterprise Institute conference, "With the Best of Intentions: Lessons Learned in K–12 Education Philanthropy," April 25, 2005, Washington, D.C.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

classic definition of a professional reform," meaning that it mostly paid for more of what already was going on in the schools. For the most part, he says, "The school districts and the schools gobbled up those grants like lunch, and they were ready for the next one." What may have been needed instead, Hentschke says, was a "radical" reform that started with an empty slate and redesigned the most basic operations of the schools. Many of the leading donors today are trying to figure out how to do just that.

Gates Foundation officials are also aware that, unless public money takes over when private money goes away, the innovative approaches the foundation is fostering will disappear with little impact.

High Schools

The Gates Foundation has attempted some of that reimagining with its high-school initiative, which brought together other philanthropies, including Carnegie, the Open Society Institute, Annenberg, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Walton, and Ford. Carnegie alone has put in $60 million for its Schools for a New Society high-school redesign effort, which aims to overhaul all the high schools in a district. "We're not ideological about attacking the problem," says Tom Vander Ark, who is in charge of the Gates Foundation's education work. "We're trying to attack it in many different ways."

Gates Foundation officials are also aware that, unless public money takes over when private money goes away, the innovative approaches the foundation is fostering will disappear with little impact. "In the narrowest sense, it's a $10 billion to $20 billion problem that we're attacking, and over time we might contribute a tenth of the solutions it will require," Vander Ark says. "It would be difficult, impractical, expensive, and ineffective for us to do this work ourselves."

Leadership, Management, and Governance

By the end of 2004, the education foundation established by Eli Broad and his wife, Edythe, had assets worth $540 million. The foundation has already committed some $135 million to overhauling fundamental aspects of urban school districts: identifying new sources of talent for positions of authority; developing alternative training methods for managers, principals, and teachers union leaders; creating new tools for analyzing performance data; and working with school boards to help those sometimes obstructionist bodies become more focused on student learning than on petty power plays. Broad, whose fortune is variously estimated at between $4 billion and $6 billion, is in his 70s, and he too plans on giving away most of that amount during his lifetime. Most of it will go toward K–12 education causes, according to Dan Katzir, the education foundation's managing director.

The foundation supports a number of what Katzir calls "branded flagship initiatives," such as the Broad Center for the Management of School Systems or the Broad Institute for School Boards. Its largest investment is a $20 million-plus stake in SchoolMatters.com, a project of Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services unit that marries information about how schools spend their money with academic indicators.

Another major foundation that has invested heavily—even more so than Broad—in improving the skills of principals and superintendents is the Wallace Foundation, which was established by DeWitt and Lila Acheson Wallace, the founders of the Reader's Digest Association. In 2000 the foundation committed $150 million over five years to improving leadership at the school and district level and is now underwriting in 24 states a wide variety of programs: leadership academies, university-school district partnerships, research, changes in what it takes to become certified as a principal, and superintendent training. Wallace and Broad, as well as Annenberg and Gates, also are underwriting the New York City Leadership Academy, a very expensive undertaking that pays aspiring principals full salaries as they train for a year to take jobs heading up schools in the city.

The Wallace Foundation's Richard Laine emphasizes that it is not enough just to improve the training of principals. Put a well-trained leader in a bad system, he's fond of saying, and "The system will win every time." What's needed, he says, are policy changes, giving the best teachers incentives to go into the most demanding schools and allowing principals to have more control over hiring and evaluating teachers and more flexibility and control over their budgets.

Teaching

Improving teaching has long been high on the agenda of many foundations. "It really all boils down to good teaching," says Janice Petrovich of the Ford Foundation. "If you can figure out how to do that, you'll make a difference."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That, however, turns out to be difficult for foundations to do well and even more difficult to sustain. Foundations actively working on this front today have a wide variety of strategies for making a difference. Some of these might be categorized as efforts to build the capacity of the current system by simply paying for professional development sessions on particular topics; others might be thought of as attempts to change the system by developing new approaches to hiring, compensating, and evaluating teachers. Ultimately, Petrovich says, increasing the capacity of the system changes the system. But foundations often are reluctant to work inside classrooms to help teachers, for fear that they won't have a systemic impact; at the same time, to make a difference broadly, foundations have to fund projects over which they have little control.

One of the most ambitious efforts to improve teaching is called Teachers for a New Era, a $65 million project underwritten by four venerable foundations: Carnegie, which initiated the effort and has the largest stake; Annenberg; Ford; and the Rockefeller Foundation. As of 2003, 11 education schools had received five-year grants to develop teacher-preparation programs that mimic the kind of clinical training that doctors receive as residents and that pay more explicit attention to the effect of the training on student learning. The grants must be matched locally.

The Milken Family Foundation has spent well over $100 million to make teaching more attractive by recognizing achievement and pushing districts to base pay on performance. The foundation's Teacher Advancement Program, which provides training opportunities to help teachers climb a career ladder toward higher salaries based on their performance, is now in place in 85 schools and is poised for a major expansion, with states and the federal government offering financial support.

"We are hell-bent on figuring out a way of creating the proper incentives and putting them into practice to attract talented people into the profession," Lowell Milken says.

Another foundation committed to improving teaching is the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, where Marshall Smith, a former acting deputy secretary of education in the Clinton administration, heads up education reforms. The former dean of the Stanford University School of Education, Smith is perhaps the leading proponent of what's known as "systemic" reform in education. He says that about half of the

Smart Money? (Table 1)

Of the 15 foundations that gave the most, a majority of their giving constituted little more than donations to the current public education system (lower-leverage). But $235 million was spent on higher-leverage efforts to alter the public school system through major interventions such as small schools, charter schools, and vouchers.

	Millions of dollars, 2002		
Foundation	**Higher leverage**	**Lower leverage**	**Total**
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	111	135	246
Walton Family Foundation	68	10	78
Annenberg Foundation	9	31	40
Carnegie Corporation of New York	6	19	25
Lilly Endowment	5	18	23
New York Community Trust	8	13	21
Ford Foundation	4	17	21
W. K. Kellogg Foundation	7	14	21
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation	6	13	19
Oberkotter Foundation	0	18	18
MBNA Foundation	2	14	16
Danforth Foundation	0	15	15
Pew Charitable Trusts	9	6	15
Goizueta Foundation	0	13	13
Total	**235**	**336**	**571**

SOURCE: Jay Greene, "Buckets into the Sea: Why Philanthropy Isn't Changing Schools, and How It Could"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

$36 million or so he has to spend on K–12 education annually goes to "trying to figure out ways of improving instruction in inner-city schools."

Academic content and performance standards are now well ingrained in American public education, Smith believes. But the standards movement that he had a hand in launching "really doesn't touch the classroom in a deep way. What's arisen in the past five or six years as an issue is the quality of the teacher and whether we have the capacity and smarts and knowledge to improve that."

Journalists rarely criticize foundations on substantive issues and are far more likely to laud them than to question their strategy or their impact.

School Choice

During the past decade, the nation's foundations have become major champions of school choice, supporting the development of charter schools and, to a lesser extent, the financing of vouchers to pay for private school tuition for low-income students. Indeed, it seems that many of the major foundations involved in education are backing charter schools in one way or another, either by supporting individual sites or by financing research or advocacy designed to promote policies friendly to charters.

Broad has nine separate school-choice initiatives. A significant number of the high schools Gates is supporting are charter schools. The Annenberg Foundation gave more than $10 million to underwrite an architecturally daring building for the Accelerated School, a highly successful charter school south of downtown Los Angeles. Financier Theodore J. Forstmann, along with the late John Walton (see "Tribute," p. 5) each gave $50 million to start the Children's Scholarship Fund, which subsidizes private school tuition for low-income students. In 2001, according to the Foundation Center, the Fund was the ninth-largest recipient of charitable donations in the area of K–12 education, and in 2002 it was the top recipient. Forstmann and Walton helped raise another $70 million for scholarships from donors that included Broad, former Hollywood super agent Michael Ovitz, and supermarket mogul Ronald W. Burkle.

Since 1998 the Walton Family Foundation started by Sam and Helen Walton, the founders of Wal-Mart, has given an estimated $284 million to K–12 education, the bulk of that to support charter schools and private school scholarships for low-income students. The foundation is by far the biggest donor to school choice-related causes and has helped support, by one estimate, 10 percent of all the nation's charter schools. "Our theory is that competition in a high enough degree will eventually create competitive pressures to encourage the existing systems to really try and compete," says Buddy Philpott, the foundation's executive director.

Can Philanthropy Make a Difference?

It is often difficult to tell whether a foundation is making a difference. Outside of evaluations paid for by the foundations themselves or even done internally, philanthropy often receives little scrutiny, and philanthropists are often treated like celebrities. Frederick M. Hess, an editor of this journal, analyzed press coverage of leading philanthropies involved in education for the publication *Philanthropy*. He concluded that journalists rarely criticize foundations on substantive issues and are far more likely to laud them than to question their strategy or their impact.

Were journalists or others to attempt it, though, it is probably easier now than in the past to determine the impact of philanthropy. That's because, in response to the national push for academic standards and accountability, movements fueled by philanthropy, states now are required to test students and report on the results. When the Annenberg Challenge was being evaluated, for example, the use of test scores as one measure of the grant's effectiveness met resistance in many cities where it operated. Today, it is expected that changes in test scores will be factored into the evaluations of interventions.

But some worry that demanding rapid test-score gains from foundation-backed reforms could lead to the abandonment of promising practices before they have a chance to prove themselves. That is why foundations such as Gates and Broad and others are trying to be strategic in the degree to which they rely on test scores as indicators of progress and are also monitoring a number of other changes including graduation rates, attendance, and qualitative changes.

Needless to say, there is a rich history of success and failure to learn from. In 1972 the Ford Foundation published a remarkably frank critique of its own education reform efforts during the 1960s. Called "A Foundation Goes to School" and written by Ed Meade, Ford's longtime education program officer, the report observed that the projects the foundation supported "underestimated the complexity of improving

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

schools" and did not fully account for the difficulty of working with unions, community leaders and parents, or the effect of broader social conditions. Foundations can't impose their view of how the district should operate, in what Marshall Smith calls a "mega-reform."

The challenge for foundations, then, is not to create the initiative that will work precisely as planned. The challenge is to use a variety of strategies—investment, capacity building, the creation of competition, parallel structures that challenge the status quo—to help the schools and districts themselves do a better job.

Tom Payzant, the veteran superintendent who heads up Boston Public Schools, says large school districts get funding from a variety of philanthropic organizations, but he has had to work hard to persuade these funders to align their efforts to support a system-wide vision of how to improve education and avoid contributing to what he calls "project-itis," which is just a series of ad hoc donations that make givers feel good but have little impact on students.

"It's been very hard for educators to stand up and say, 'I don't want the money unless it's aligned with what we're doing,' without being snooty about it," he says.

Lowell Milken says that one way to judge the work of foundations is whether other givers get on board and whether a project changes the way the district does business. "Is the district willing to adjust its budget and, if a project meets its goals, will they take on the whole cost? All those issues are critical to us, in looking at how we should proceed."

Despite the sometimes gloomy assessments of philanthropy's impact, there is reason for hope. Giving to K–12 education will surely increase. Foundations are working together much more than in the past. They seem to recognize that public policy has to change if their projects are to be sustained, and foundations are becoming more active in the policy arenas. The philanthropists are funding outside evaluations, and they seem to be more transparent and forthright about the shortcomings of what they're funding as well as their successes. Vander Ark of the Gates Foundation openly acknowledges that 10–20 percent of the foundation's grants are not working, and another 10–20 percent are working out differently than planned. If it were otherwise, he says, one would suspect that the foundation was only placing safe bets, and safe bets are unlikely to produce the major improvements that are needed in education.

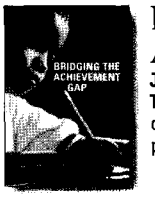
Richard Lee Colvin is director of the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media, based at Teachers College, Columbia University. This article is adapted from a chapter in the forthcoming book The Best of Intentions: How Philanthropy Is Reshaping the Landscape of K–12 Education.

BROOKINGS
INSTITUTION PRESS

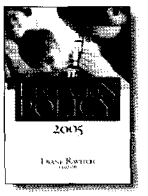
Essential books on Education Policy

COMING IN OCTOBER
Getting Choice Right
Ensuring Equity and Efficiency in Education Policy
Julian Betts and Tom Loveless, eds.
cloth, 0-8157-5332-2, $49.95
paper, 0-8157-5331-4, $19.95

Besieged
School Boards and the Future of Education Politics
William Howell, ed.
cloth, 0-8157-3684-3, $59.95
paper, 0-8157-3683-5, $29.95

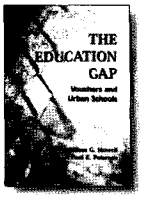


Bridging the Achievement Gap
John E. Chubb and Tom Loveless
cloth, 0-8157-1400-9, $59.95
paper, 0-8157-1401-7, $24.95



Brookings Papers on Education Policy: 2005
Diane Ravitch, ed.
paper, 0-8157-7407-9, $30.00

Educating Citizens
International Perspectives on Civic Values and School Choice
Patrick J. Wolf and Steven Macedo, eds.
cloth, 0-8157-9516-5, $59.95
paper, 0-8157-9517-3, $24.95



COMING IN OCTOBER
The Education Gap
Vouchers and Urban Schools Revised edition
William G. Howell and Paul E. Peterson
paper, 0-8157-3685-1, $19.95

Making School Reform Work
New Partnerships for Real Change
Paul T. Hill and James Harvey, eds.
paper, 0-8157-3641-x, $16.95

Brookings Institution Press
Phone: 800-537-5487 or 410-516-6956
Fax: 410-516-6998

www.brookings.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Making Up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

feature

the Rules as You Play **the Game**

A Conflict of Interest at the Very Heart of NCLB

BY PAUL E. PETERSON

Chicago's school district wants the federal afterschool dollar. So do many other districts. And more than two thousand private providers, for-profit and nonprofit alike, are making their own claims.

More than $2.5 billion is at stake, a figure scheduled to increase considerably if budgetary trends continue. How should the money be distributed? Will parental choice and competition among service providers determine the outcome? Or will school districts capture the resources for themselves? Can schoolchildren be the winners this time?

These questions have grown in import as afterschool programs, the heart of the supplemental service provision of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), take on increasing significance in the implementation of the historic federal law. As more and more schools fail to make their NCLB-mandated Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals, the demand for supplemental education services, such as tutoring, summer school, or, most often, instruction after the end of the regular school day, is skyrocketing. Especially within big cities, where the largest concentrations of disadvantaged students reside, these afterschool programs are becoming one of the most popular features of the Bush administration's school reforms.

ILLUSTRATION BY GARY HOVLAND

The supplemental services program has major potential, but it is freighted with an inherent conflict of interest that could prove its undoing: the same school districts that are failing to make AYP are the gatekeepers for these afterschool funds. As the stakes increase, so does the funding, and so do the incentives to control those dollars.

The Legislative Compromise

To appreciate the current predicament, one need only understand that when NCLB was being hatched, afterschool was just an afterthought. The main thrust of the legislation was and remains the need to meet state proficiency standards by 2014.

But what happens when students fail to meet their AYP targets? Not much, really. For all the dire talk about the strictures NCLB places on states and localities, two of the three consequences thus far have amounted to little or nothing. Twice-failed schools (those NCLB calls "in need of improvement") must offer parents a choice of sending their children to another public school within the district, but that option is being exercised by no more than 1 percent of eligible families. After five failing years, schools are to be "reconstituted." Despite the dramatic verbiage, reconstitution, while it has in a few cases led to major change, usually means little more than hiring a new principal and asking teachers whether they would like to remain on the staff or move somewhere else in the district.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That leaves the third consequence, the requirement that students must be given access to supplemental services if a school fails for three years' running. It was not supposed to be the most important result. In fact, it was born of a compromise between frustrated Capitol Hill conservatives, who saw vouchers as the accountability lever of choice, and liberals, who wanted anything but vouchers. Republicans, particularly in the House of Representatives, tossed the idea of supplemental services out as a last desperate card to avoid losing all choice options. While this seemed a backdoor way of bringing outside providers—nonprofit and for-profit, secular and religious—into the school, the legislators neglected one thing: they left the keys with the school districts. The districts could control access to students and parents and the terms of the contracts with private providers, and in many cases they could supply their own supplemental services. Even failing districts, nominally prohibited from providing such services, can divert the afterschool monies to their own use simply by suppressing parental demand for the programs, which are voluntary. Since the school districts get to keep every dollar not spent on the afterschool program and deploy those dollars for programs of their own, they have a clear financial disincentive to encourage student participation in the program.

A Competitive Market (Table 1)

A wide range of entities has been approved by states to provide afterschool programs and other supplemental services. By the end of 2004, ten for-profit companies had been approved as providers in 25 or more states.

Private Provider	Headquarters	States
Plato Learning, Inc.	Bloomington, MN	41
Kaplan K-12 Learning Services	New York City	37
Education Station (Catapult Learning)	Baltimore, MD	37
Huntington Learning Centers, Inc.	Oradell, NJ	33
Kumon Math and Reading Centers	Teaneck, NJ	31
The Princeton Review	New York City	30
Failure Free Reading	Concord, NC	26
Brainfuse Online Instruction	New York City	25
Club Z! In-Home Tutoring Service	Tampa, FL	25
Newton Learning (Edison Schools, Inc.)	New York City	25

SOURCE: "Federal Law Spurs Private Companies to Market Tutoring," December 8, 2004, *Education Week*

The Growth of the Afterschool Program

Despite disincentives to school districts, parental response has been surprisingly strong. Admittedly, fewer than 100,000 students participated in afterschool programs during the 2002–03 school year, according to Department of Education records. But the following year, that number doubled to 218,031, or 11.3 percent of all eligible students. As more students become eligible for afterschool services, and as word of the program spreads throughout disadvantaged communities, federal officials expect that number to continue to soar, with big gains expected as soon as the 2004–05 tally is made.

The supply of service providers is growing to meet the demand (see Table 1). Nationwide, more than 2,000 private entities now offer supplemental services. In most cases they teach small groups of students after the end of the regular school day. The degree of competition varies from one place to the next, the most intense being within big cities that have large numbers of eligible students. Some states, such as Florida and Idaho, report no students in thrice-failed schools and so have no one eligible to receive supplemental services. Other states, like California and New York, report hundreds of thousands of eligible students. Although boutique providers limit themselves to one or two locales, the largest companies, such as Kaplan, Princeton Review, and Plato Learning, are extending their reach into a majority of the states. Their energetic moves make good economic sense. Providers are finding that they can recruit quality teachers, develop effective curricula, put into place strong management systems, and still make a reasonable profit.

Given the still pent-up demand (in Illinois, for instance, only 5 percent of eligible students are getting supplemental services), the competition for the afterschool dollar will no doubt intensify dramatically with the passage of time. Only 2 percent of the $2.5 billion available for the supplemental services program has so far been tapped. With per-student costs averaging between $700 and $2,500, depending on location and other special circumstances, the number of students served could exceed 2,000,000.

In short, if private providers build on their initial successes, if school districts are unable to stop program growth, and if Title I funding continues its steady growth (see Figure 1), the afterschool program could expand to more than ten times its 2004 size. Just as Head Start began on a limited scale but has now spread to the point where well over half of all four-year-olds are in some kind of nursery or preschool program, so the afterschool program can be expected to take on a life of its own.

Many low-income families have quite practical reasons for finding afterschool services attractive, and they can be expected to seize this new opportunity to enjoy the same outside help

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as middle-class families have for their afterschool needs. For one thing, they provide a safe haven for a child during hours when most parents are still at work.

The Academic Potential

The afterschool option has educational attractions as well. Traditionally, after school has been considered a time for play, sports, or extracurricular activity, as well as for latchkeys, television, PlayStation, or life on the streets. Organized afterschool programs serving the disadvantaged have tended to focus more on snacks and recreational activities (basketball, roller skating, and gymnastics) than on reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Predictably, such programs have had little impact on academic progress. Both a review of traditional afterschool programs by Swarthmore economist Rob Hollister and a recent federally funded study conducted by Mathematica found little in the way of educational benefit from traditional afterschool activities. Only 50 percent of the directors surveyed in the Mathematica study saw "enhancing students' ability to meet specific academic goals" as one of their top three program objectives. As Hollister concluded, "There is a tremendous struggle between those who believe that afterschool programs should be focused on skill development ... and those who stress the need to provide an atmosphere for growth and adult contact for children who are too often 'home alone.'"

Presumably, by explicitly identifying afterschool programs as a way of bringing all students up to the state-determined proficiency standard, NCLB has given after school the academic focus previous programs lacked. And by introducing a measure of choice and competition into the equation, providers place themselves at risk if they do not have educationally credible programming.

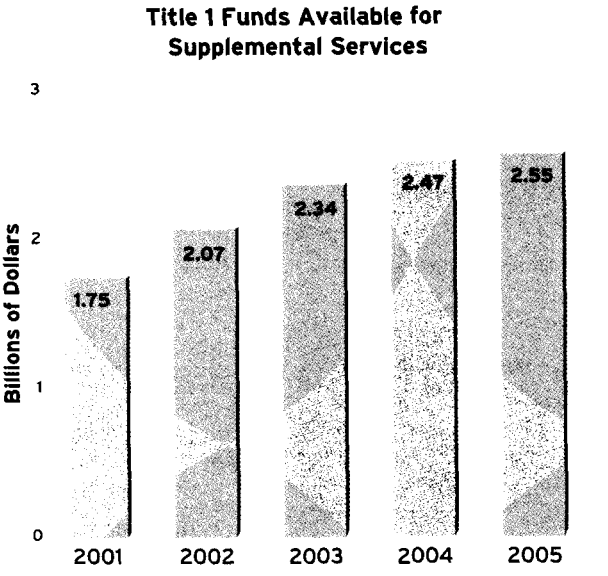
At this point, we don't know what kind of academic lift these programs can offer. On the one hand, many of the afterschool programs are limited to only one to two hours a day over a three-month period. On the other hand, education providers have strong incentives — and few impediments — to make these moments educationally rewarding. Unlike the regular school day, the afterschool program is voluntary, not compulsory. Education providers, to secure their revenue flow, must find ways to persuade students to attend. Fortunately, voluntary attendance greatly reduces the problem disruptive students pose for inner-city teachers during the regular school day, when attendance is compulsory. And the afterschool teachers themselves can be hired outside the usual union rules and grievance structures. Providers can recruit regular public-school teachers for afterschool duty if they wish, but ineffective teachers can be readily dismissed. Meanwhile, the teachers enjoy the opportunity to work with those students who are motivated enough to sign up for the program. The conditions are such that the afterschool experience should, in most cases, be educationally positive.

By explicitly identifying afterschool programs as a way of bringing all students up to the state-determined proficiency standard, NCLB has given after school the academic focus previous programs lacked.

Nor is there any inherent reason to think students cannot learn late in the day. After all, researchers have discovered that the biological clock of young people ticks faster later in the day than at the crack of dawn. (For older adults, it is just the opposite.)

A Flood of Federal Funds (Figure 1)

Between fiscal years 2001 and 2005, federal funds available for the supplemental education services provision of NCLB increased by 45 percent.



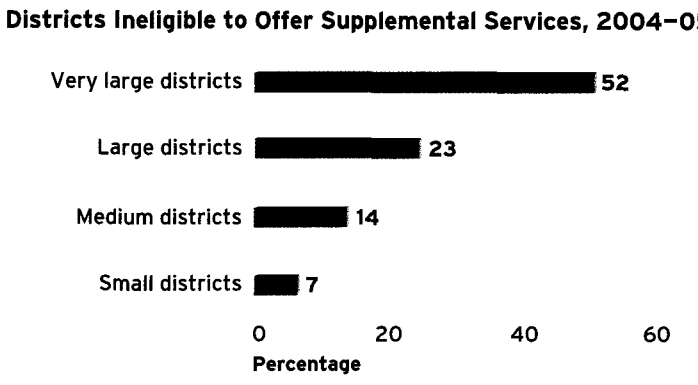
Note: Supplemental Services funds are limited to no more than 20 percent of that fiscal year's appropriations under Title I, Part A, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. These monies may also be spent on transportation costs related to the public-school choice provision of the law or, in the absence of parental demand for school choice or supplemental services, other district programs.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education Budget Office

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An Impending Big-City Battle (Figure 2)

Large urban school districts are the most likely to be deemed ineligible to provide supplemental services, which means that they stand to lose the most federal money to other providers.



SOURCE: Center on Education Policy, "From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 3 of the No Child Left Behind Act" (2005)

We also know that privately run afterschool programs have long been key components of effective education in other countries, especially those that score high on international math and science examinations, such as Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan. Those countries have a widespread system of private, academically rigorous "cram" schools to which middle-class families send their students in order to enhance their opportunities for admission to college.

In short, strong parental demand, coupled with new suppliers entering an intensely competitive market, could boost the performance of those low-income students who are seeking ways to overcome their education disadvantages. Should that happen, the afterschool initiative could turn out to be the most important NCLB reform after all.

The Chicago Factor

For all their potential, and perhaps because of their potential, afterschool programs are fast becoming an arena for acrimonious political debate. And what better place to witness the rancor than the City of Broad Shoulders and Democratic dynasties: Chicago. In fact, under Mayor Richard Daley's strong direction, the Windy City has, since the late 1990s, anticipated much of what would be included in NCLB. It has, for instance, required that 3rd graders pass an end-of-the-year exam (or boost poor scores by attending summer school) in order to advance to 4th grade.

One would expect Chicago to be among the strongest supporters of the new federal law on the question of afterschool academic programs except for one thing: despite some gains in student test scores in recent years, the Chicago school district, like many other big-city districts (see Figure 2), still has so few students making AYP that, under the federal law, the district has been designated as failing and thus cannot offer its own supplemental service programs.

The outcry from big-city school officials has been bitter. "When push comes to shove, we're talking about children in desperate need of help," a Chicago school administrator told an *Education Week* reporter last September. "Should we just cross our fingers and wait? These children need these services. They need these services yesterday." Federal officials argued in response that if the school district can't educate students during the regular school day, it's time to let others have a chance after the bell rings.

Eventually the two sides reached a short-term compromise that allowed the Chicago school district to provide services itself in 2005 without suffering any serious financial penalty. But for future years, the issue remains on the table, with the feds, at least for now, continuing to insist that no failing school district be allowed to provide supplemental education services.

The federal focus on failing districts is understandable, given the way the law is currently phrased. But in terms of public policy, the central issue is not whether a district is failing but whether school districts should both offer services and control the terms of access by private providers.

Though ignored in most of the public discussion, the financial conflict of interest is clear: school districts are given the authority to monitor afterschool education vendors even while acting as vendors themselves.

The Financial Conflict of Interest

Though ignored in most of the public discussion, the financial conflict of interest is clear: school districts are given the authority to monitor afterschool education vendors even while acting as vendors themselves. If this arrangement

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Strengthening Supplemental Services: *Four Recommendations*

1. Currently, students are eligible for services only after a school has been found to be failing for three consecutive years. But there is no justification for a waiting period. Afterschool programs should be made available to students attending any school found failing after one year.

2. To avoid conflicts of interest, a new agency should certify and sign contracts with providers. This agency should hire parent advocates who inform families of the offerings and performance record of available providers.

3. In order to eliminate the incentive of school districts to minimize student participation in afterschool programs, any unused portion of the 20 percent set-aside for supplemental services should be returned to the federal treasury if a district is not serving at least 25 percent of its eligible students.

4. All states should follow the test-score performance of individual students in the way that Florida, North Carolina, and Texas currently do. Were that done, it would be possible to ascertain the impact of afterschool and many other education interventions.

— *Paul Peterson*

were used in the banking industry, the Securities and Exchange Commission would also be a brokerage firm.

Admittedly, a district, if designated as failing, cannot offer the services itself. But that does not eliminate the conflict of interest. If parents are demanding afterschool services, then up to 20 percent of Title I funds given to that district must be used to fund the private providers offering the services. If parental demand for such programs is slight, then the failing school district may use the money for other purposes.

School districts have powerful weapons that can be used in the battle to limit the scope of the demand and control the provision of services. For one thing, privacy rules give districts exclusive control over communications with students and families. Although districts, by federal rule, must send a letter explaining the afterschool option to all eligible families, that letter, often sent late in the school year, is typically laden with the usual bureaucratic jargon. According to the Center on Education Policy study, "Parents thought the letters informing them about services were too long and complicated and buried key information." As Michael Petrilli, a former federal education official has pointed out, "It takes very aggressive marketing to make low-income families aware of their options, and districts are not doing more than is required under the letter of the law."

To be fair, not every district is proving obstreperous. On the contrary, a number of the largest, New York City included, are doing their best to inform parents of the options available to them. Even where cooperation is less clear-cut, it can in many instances be attributed to significant start-up problems. Schools are not identified as failing until the summer or well into the new school year in which afterschool services are to be made available. Districts must then organize their own afterschool programs or sign contracts with providers, then inform parents of services being offered.

But with a modicum of adjustments, those practical problems can be addressed, if districts are inclined to do so. Unfortunately, financial incentives and ingrained opposition to choice and competition push in the opposite direction. When asked for ways of improving NCLB, one administrator said, "Eliminate the Supplemental Services provision; it is very expensive and is of minimal value." Union leaders are no less antagonistic. In New York, for example, the spokesman for the New York State United Teachers, the state's largest teachers union, commented, "Our concern is that it is going to be difficult if not impossible to track whether or not this money is being spent effectively." Although the point is well taken, teacher unions seldom show a similar kind of skepticism for most other kinds of school expenditure.

"It takes very aggressive marketing to make low-income families aware of their options, and districts are not doing more than is required under the letter of the law."

The animosity to the afterschool programs and other supplemental services was amply revealed in the Center on Education Policy survey of school administrators, who, when given anonymity, frankly stated their deep-seated suspicion of the profit motive:

"Supplemental Service funds should go to districts that would provide services without the profit motive."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I would not use federal funds to support a program being operated by individuals not held to the same standards that public school employees are held to."

"Supplemental Services for any qualified provider will cause a cottage industry to develop that will be driven by profit and not academics."

Suspicious of the private providers, mindful of the cost to their own coffers, and in control of the access channel, districts thus have both incentives and opportunities to check program growth. In Worcester, Massachusetts, for example, the school district, which offers its own afterschool programming, actively discourages other entities from offering their wares. Says one for-profit provider, "The school district is the owner of the relationship between provider and the parent. And I can't get in." In such cases, says Harvard professor William Howell, "It's like asking a BMW dealer to extol the benefits of buying a Volvo."

Suspicious of the private providers, mindful of the cost to their own coffers, and in control of the access channel, districts thus have both incentives and opportunities to check program growth.

Such resistance to outside vendors is not limited to the districts in Senator Ted Kennedy's home state. In testimony before a congressional subcommittee last May, Jeffrey Cohen, president of Catapult Learning, reported the numerous obstacles providers are facing nationally:

"We have seen parent notification letters that are impossible to decipher. We have seen multipart registration processes that seem to delay registration, rather than encouraging it. And, we have been prohibited from talking to school principals and parents."

Districts are asked to hold "fairs" where competing providers can tell parents about their offerings, said Cohen, but, according to a high official at one of the major providers, "Districts do nothing beyond the bare minimum to promote the fairs to parents."

When districts have financial incentives to limit participation, such obstacles make bureaucratic sense, however much they limit opportunities for families. Admittedly, private providers need to be monitored, so as to avoid "suede-shoe operators" from peddling their wares to unwary parents, a concern of Democratic representative George Miller, who serves as the ranking minority member of the House Education Committee. Some have been found to be paying parents to attend, and others have used a web site managed from overseas to work with students. As the program ramps up, all private providers need to demonstrate that their services are beneficial. But to turn the job of managing providers over to school districts that have an incentive to limit the competition defies all regulatory logic.

Of course, it cannot be left to the industry to monitor itself. But as long as districts have the monitoring authority, they can be expected to look for legal constraints that will keep the programs in-house. "There are some districts that are clearly not playing fair and have been a thorn in the side of the providers," says Petrilli.

Despite tighter federal guidelines issued in June 2005, local districts still have a great deal of latitude when negotiating contracts with providers. As Michael Casserly, head of the Council of the Great City Schools, reports, "School districts and potential providers have found themselves tussling over the length of the contracts, per pupil fees, billing and payment procedures, staff qualifications, union rules, and the like."

In short, the possibilities for burdensome regulations can be endless whenever the financial incentives to create obstacles are ingrained. As an administrator in Worcester explained, "We're not required to provide transportation. And, to be honest, to send money out of the district, I'm not sure that we would even offer to do that."

But Will Children Benefit?

How this power struggle will evolve, and whether students will benefit, remains the big unknown. Unfortunately, the accountability provisions of NCLB do not contain any mechanism for ensuring that students profit from afterschool programs, mainly because states are focusing more on overall school performance than on the performance of individual students.

If the NCLB accountability system can be gradually shifted to a student focus, then the impact of afterschool programs, along with much else, can become part of the planning for the future. Until then, one can expect private providers to claim great success without much convincing evidence. And school districts will complain about problems, corruption, and profit making with no more than an anecdote here and there to justify their self-serving complaints. But for those who think that choice and competition are the key to school reform, the afterschool intervention is the most promising vehicle currently available.

Paul E. Peterson is professor of government, Harvard University, and the editor-in-chief of Education Next.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

UPCOMING CONFERENCE

...uacy Lawsuits:

...heir Growing Impact on American Education

October 13–14, 2005

On the campus of the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

ORGANIZED BY:

Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West

PARTICIPANTS INCLUDE:

Michael Podgursky
University of Missouri – Columbia

Eric Hanushek
Hoover Institution
Stanford University

Caroline Hoxby
Harvard University

Martha Derthick
University of Virginia

Peter Schrag
Sacramento Bee

Michael Heise
Cornell Law School

Andrew Rotherham
Progressive Policy Institute

Michael Rebell
Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc.

TO REGISTER, PLEASE VISIT:

www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg

PEPG

THE PROGRAM ON EDUCATION POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

within

...e Taubman Center for State and Local Government
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University
79 J. F. Kennedy Street, Cambridge, MA 02138
Phone: (617) 495-7976 Fax: (617) 496-4428

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ILLUSTRATION BY DAN VASCONCELLOS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The *Truths* about Charter Schools

With charter schools now serving approximately one million students nationwide, policymakers have been awaiting rigorous evaluations of their effects on student learning. The following articles help fill the gap.

Caroline Hoxby and Jonah Rockoff present evidence from the first randomized evaluation of charter schools, focusing on three charter schools in Chicago. Robert Bifulco and Helen Ladd examine charter schools in the Tar Heel state, concentrating on those students whose progress can be compared in both charter and traditional public schools.

New Research from Chicago and North Carolina

The picture that emerges is, to say the least, complex. But we learn some significant things: Charter schools appear to do better with young students who matriculate directly into these schools than with students who enter during the middle-school years. Students who remain in charter schools do better than those who migrate back and forth between sectors. ☛

- **Findings from the City of Big Shoulders** by Hoxby & Rockoff ..... page **52**
- **Results from the Tar Heel State** by Bifulco & Ladd ..... page **60**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Findings from the City of Big Shoulders

Younger Students Learn More in Charter Schools

BY CAROLINE M. HOXBY AND JONAH E. ROCKOFF

The number of charter schools has grown very rapidly in the United States, from essentially none in 1990 to more than 3,400 today. Supporters believe that the flexibility granted these new public schools allows them to be more innovative and responsive to student needs than traditional public schools are. And the fact that no student attends a charter school unless his parents want to keep him there means that families can "vote with their feet." When a parent leaves a charter, so does the funding associated with his child. Thus a charter school cannot survive without satisfied parents. But charter schools do not just answer to parents; they must also persuade an authorizer to recharter them every few years, and they must participate in statewide testing and accountability. Will this concoction of flexibility, answering to parents, and accountability to the government raise school quality? Bluntly put, do students in charter schools learn more than their counterparts in traditional public schools? More than they would have learned had they stayed put?

A Lottery-Based Evaluation of Charter Schools

Getting a reliable answer to these questions is vital to the current policy debate, but researchers who try to answer them face considerable obstacles. First and foremost, most charter schools are new and small. They just don't yet have enough results for researchers to draw conclusions. Second, although all charter schools share the features mentioned above, they are otherwise a diverse lot. Many set up shop in urban areas, serve minority and low-income students, and rely on a strategy and curriculum associated with an education management organization. However, some charter schools serve very rural, mostly white students. Some are run as start-ups by parent or community groups that do not associate themselves with a particular strategy or curriculum. Even within the world of education management organizations, approaches to learning can differ substantially. In short, an assessment of some charter schools is useful for learning about similar charter schools, but we should not expect it to inform us about all charter schools.

Even when researchers can evaluate charter schools that are large enough to contribute useful results to a study, old enough to have a track record, and representative of a substantial share of all charter schools, they face a daunting analytical challenge: finding students in the regular public schools who are truly comparable to the charter school students. Students who apply to attend charter schools are a self-selected group, and simply comparing them with all other students in local public schools is likely to be misleading. We do not even know whether to expect self-selection to work for or against charter schools. On the one hand, parents who try out charter schools may be especially motivated. On the other hand, parents whose children are doing well may avoid being "guinea pigs" in relatively untried schools.

In our study, we overcome this challenge by exploiting a feature common to most charter schools: the lottery that schools use to admit students when they have more applicants

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than spaces. Such lotteries present an opportunity, rare in education, to conduct randomized experiments of the type more commonly used in medical research.

We use this lottery-based approach to evaluate three schools managed by the Chicago Charter School Foundation (CCSF). Our treatment group (those who, in medicine, would receive the pill) comprises charter school applicants who drew a lottery number that earned them a place at one of the charter schools (lotteried in). Our control group (those who would receive the placebo) comprises the applicants who were lotteried out. All told, the study focuses on 2,448 students who are divided between the lotteried-in and lotteried-out groups. It's important to realize that all of the students in the study applied to charter schools, so self-selection is the same for all of them. All that distinguishes the groups is their randomly drawn lottery numbers, so we can be confident that the groups are comparable not only in observable ways (like race and income), but also in less tangible ways, such as motivation to succeed. Currently, we can compare the progress of both groups for up to four years following their application. We are continuing the study and will report further results as they become available.

Our results to date, which indicate clear positive effects of attending a charter school on the math and reading test scores of students who enter charter schools in kindergarten through 5th grade, represent the most credible evidence yet available on how charter schools affect student achievement. They are also uniquely informative for policymaking. In the long run, as charter schools become more established, almost all of their students will have entered in the early grades. Policymakers should therefore assign greater weight to studies that focus on such students than they do to studies that, because they lack experimental data, must focus on atypical students who enter charter schools when they are older.

The Chicago Charter School Foundation

Chicago is home to almost all the charter school students (8,817 of 9,980) in Illinois. Charter schools in Illinois are free to establish their own missions and curricula, but they participate in the state accountability system and must abide by personnel restrictions similar to those of regular public schools. In Chicago, charter schools receive a per-student fee equal to only 75 percent of the average per-pupil operating spending in traditional public schools. For the 2003–04 school year, it was $5,279.

The Chicago Charter School Foundation is a charitable organization that has been operating since 1997. It oversees five primary schools, one high school, and one K–12 school. Together, its schools enroll more than half of Chicago's charter school students. Seats in the charter schools are in demand. In the spring of 2004, CCSF schools had 2.4 applicants for every student they could admit. Most CCSF schools are run by nonprofit education management organizations, but one is run by a for-profit organization.

As charter schools become more established, almost all of their students will have entered in the early grades. Policymakers should therefore assign greater weight to studies that focus on such students than to studies [of] atypical students who enter charter schools when they are older.

ALL PHOTOS / TONY ARMOUR

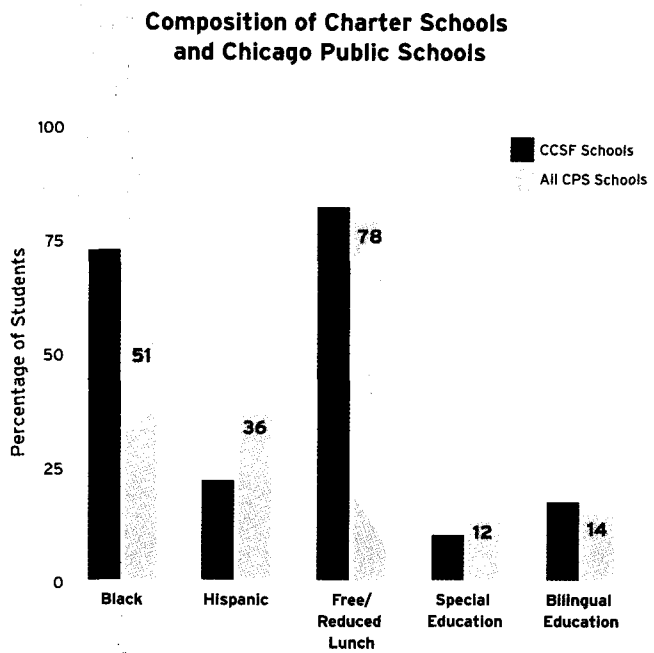
Our current report relies on CCSF's oldest schools, all of which have been in operation since the late 1990s and have produced enough results to be evaluated: Longwood (K–12), with 1,200 students in Washington Heights; Bucktown (K–8), with 600 students in Logan Square; and Prairie (K–8), with 350 students in Roseland. Longwood is run by Edison Schools, which is for-profit, while Bucktown and Prairie are operated by the nonprofit American Quality Schools. Although these education management organizations differ somewhat, their strategies are fairly typical of organizations geared toward urban, disadvantaged children. They feature a structured school day and curriculum, combined with a family-oriented approach designed to get parents involved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

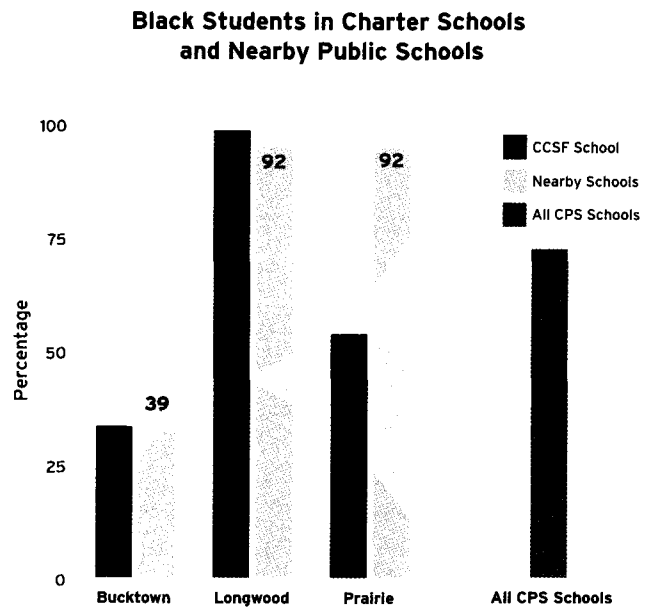
A Snapshot of Charters in Chicago (Figures 1a—1d)

The Chicago Charter School Foundation (CCSF) schools in this study are disproportionately minority and poor compared to Chicago Public Schools (CPS) overall. When measured against nearby CPS schools, however, it is clear that CCSF schools are a reflection of their neighborhoods.

(Figure 1a)



(Figure 1b)



The charter schools we study are all located in neighborhoods where the population is disproportionately minority and poor, but the schools are not alike. Longwood is in a very black neighborhood, and 99 percent of its students are black. Bucktown and Prairie are in neighborhoods that are mixed ethnically, but they draw students who are disproportionately likely to be Hispanic and in need of bilingual education (see Figures 1a through 1c).

The charter school students are about as likely to be eligible for special education and for the free or reduced-price lunch program as are students in the regular Chicago public schools. It's very important to use the regular public schools' classifications of students into lunch program, special education, and bilingual education. Otherwise, the classifications could reflect differences in how often the charter schools place students in these programs rather than their students' traits.

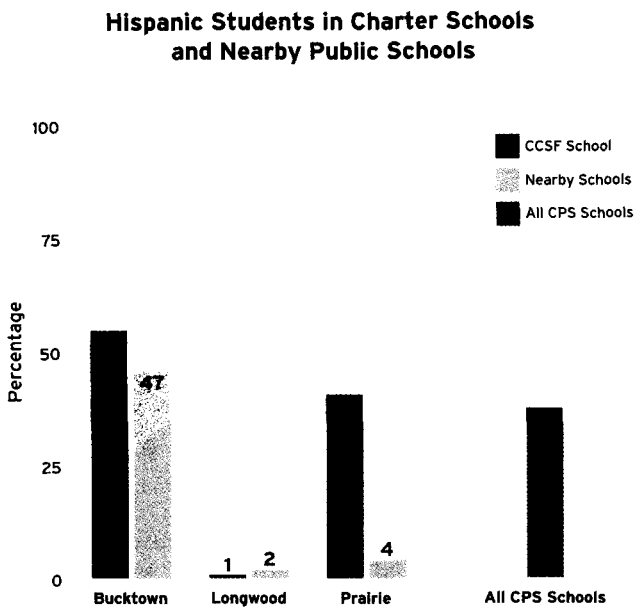
The effects of attending a charter school reported in any study can only safely be extrapolated to students and schools like those included in the study. The students in our study are urban, dominated by racial and ethnic minorities, and largely disadvantaged. All of the students in our study applied to a charter school, so our results pertain to students who want to attend charter schools. Of course, these are precisely the students in whom policymakers are interested. No one suggests that students who do not want to attend charter schools should be forced to enroll in them, so learning whether they would have done better or worse in such schools is irrelevant.

The CCSF Lotteries

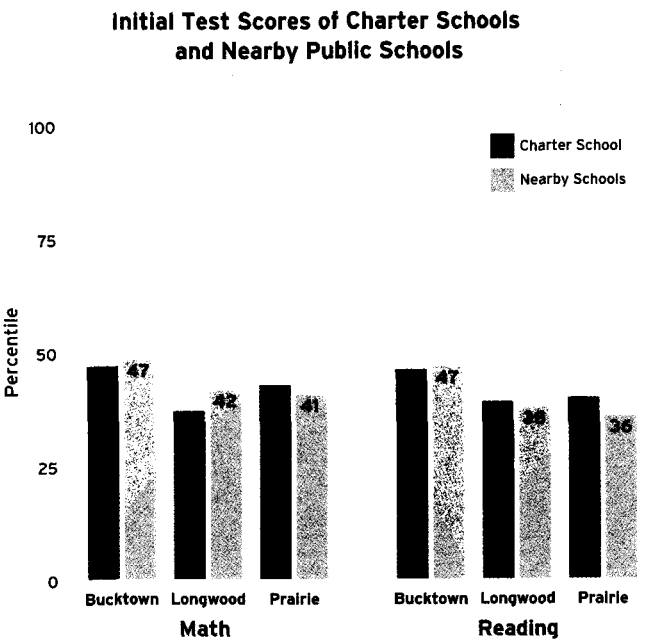
The charter school lotteries we study are pretty standard. A separate lottery is held for each school and grade. For example, if Bucktown has 60 kindergarten places available for 120 applicants and five 2nd-grade places available for 25 applicants, there would be a kindergarten lottery and a 2nd-grade lottery. After a charter school's first year of operating a particular grade, it is normal for the most places to be available

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Figure 1c)



(Figure 1d)



Note: Nearby public schools are schools within a three-mile radius of the respective charter school, with the exception of Prairie which draws from an Hispanic area with a smaller radius.

SOURCES: Consortium on Chicago School Research data and National Center for Education Statistics data

in kindergarten. In each lottery, applications are assigned a random number and ordered according to it. Using this ordering, the places available in each grade in each school are filled. (If a student is lotteried in, then his or her siblings are also automatically granted a place if they apply in a subsequent year and in a grade for which there is space available.)

In this article, we focus on students who participated in the lotteries held in spring 2000, 2001, and 2002. The Consortium on Chicago School Research generously agreed to match as many of these students as was possible to the Chicago Public Schools' student database using their names, dates of birth, and the school and grade they reported attending when they applied. These data provide us with information on achievement, as measured by the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), before students applied and, even more crucially, with post-application achievement data for students who remained in Chicago's regular public schools.

All students who enrolled in a charter school were matched to a Chicago Public Schools record, as were 73 percent of the charter school applicants who applied but did not enroll. We ultimately limit our analysis to the 2,448 of these students who applied from a Chicago public school or applied to kindergarten (and thus were not in any school when they applied). We do this because the correct comparison for a student who applies from a private school is a lotteried-out student who would not appear in the Chicago Public Schools database. Our results should therefore be interpreted as the effect of attending a CCSF charter school on students who would otherwise be attending a regular public school, not the effect on students who would otherwise be attending a private school.

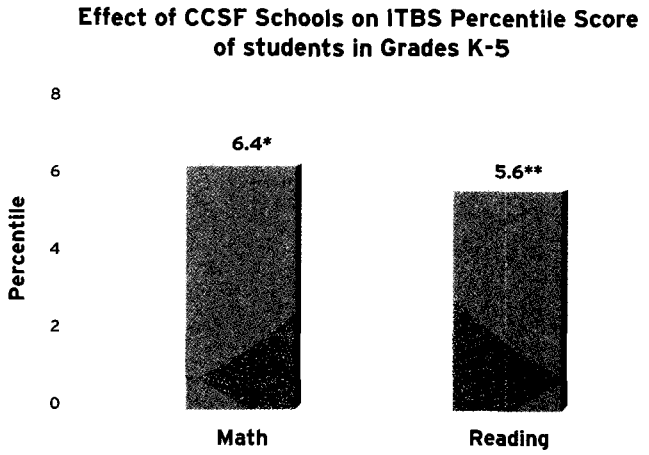
Enrollment in Regular Public Schools

One oft-stated concern about charter schools is that they will draw away the highest-achieving students from the regular public schools around them. We can address this issue by comparing the prior test scores of charter school applicants in our data with the test scores of students in regular public schools

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Elementary Effect of Charters (Figure 2)

Between 2000 and 2004, the lotteried-in CCSF school students in grades K–5 scored significantly higher on both the math and reading segments of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) than the students who were lotteried out.



* Significant at the 5% level

** Significant at the 10% level

SOURCE: Authors' calculations from Consortium on Chicago School Research data

in their neighborhoods (within three miles). This exercise assumes that students would attend local schools if charter schools did not exist. If this is basically correct, the comparisons give a sense of how a charter school's existence affects regular public schools around it.

Longwood's applicants, before applying to the charter school, had similar reading scores but lower math scores (5 percentile points lower) than other students in neighboring regular public schools. Bucktown's applicants had similar reading scores but lower math scores (7 percentile points lower) compared with students in neighboring regular public schools. Applicants to Prairie score about the same in math as students in the neighboring regular public schools, but their reading scores are higher (4 percentile points higher). As we mentioned above, however, Prairie draws from a neighborhood with a smaller radius than the one we allow, and its students' earlier scores are typical of that smaller neighborhood. In short, the charter schools draw students who are, on average, somewhat lower achieving than public school students in the neighborhoods where the schools are located (see Figure 1d). While the differences in incoming achievement are not dramatic, they certainly do not support the theory that charter schools drain regular public schools of their best, most-advantaged students. Remember that the above differences in earlier achievement do not affect our results because they are between applicants and nonapplicants. For our control group, we use lotteried-out applicants, not nonapplicants.

Attrition and Noncompliance

Some charter-school applicants do not comply with the treatment that the lottery "assigns" them. A small share of lotteried-in students do not actually enroll in a charter school. Instead, they enroll in a private school, a public school in another district, or—most often—continue in a regular Chicago public school. Also, some lotteried-out students do not continue to attend the Chicago public school from which they applied. They switch to a private school, a public school in another district, or even a different charter school.

Students who remain somewhere in the Chicago public school system (including charter schools) appear in our database, making them "observed noncompliers." Accounting for observed noncompliance in a randomized experiment is a fairly simple matter; we can adjust the estimated effect of attending a charter school to reflect the fact that some lotteried-in students did not attend.

The remaining noncompliers, however, are not observed because they disappear from the database when, for instance, they move to a suburban school district or switch to a private school. Unobserved noncompliers ("attriters") are a problem in a randomized study if the characteristics of students who attrite among the lotteried in are different from the characteristics of students who attrite among the lotteried out. Fortunately, this problem does not arise in our study: the patterns of attrition are very similar among lotteried-in and lotteried-out students. Most important, the lotteried-out students who attrite are neither higher nor lower scoring than the lotteried-in students who attrite. Thus our results should not be affected by the fact that we are not able to track every student through every postlottery school year.

Large Lotteries Work Best

CCSF followed careful procedures to ensure that their lotteries were truly random. But do randomized lotteries automatically generate treatment and control groups that are comparable? For the group of applicants as a whole, they apparently did. Looking at earlier test scores and demographic characteristics, we find no statistically significant differences between the lotteried-in and lotteried-out groups. And the fact that the groups are so similar in their outward traits suggests they are also similar in unobservable traits like motivation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet in addition to checking whether the lotteried-in and lotteried-out students are comparable as whole groups, we also need to check that subgroups of students, sorted by the grade to which they applied, are comparable. That is, we need to check the comparability of lotteried-in and lotteried-out students who entered as, say, 2nd graders. The reason we need to check these subgroups is that separate lotteries were run for each grade of entry. To see this point, let's consider a concrete example. Suppose that a school held a lottery among 100 applicants for 50 kindergarten places and held a lottery among 20 applicants for two 6th-grade places. For the same reason that flipping a coin 100 times would probably result in about 50 percent heads, randomization would probably ensure comparability between the 50 lotteried-in and 50 lotteried-out kindergarteners. But we can be much less confident about the 6th-grade lottery, even if we know it is random, because there are so few applicants and places. Randomization could easily produce two lotteried-in students who just happen to be quite different from the 18 lotteried-out students.

In fact, the example is close to the truth. We find that randomization does ensure comparable groups in grades at which quite a few students are admitted. However, randomization is insufficient to ensure comparable groups in grades of entry that are rarely used. Since most students start in charter schools in early grades (kindergarten and 1st grade alone account for about 50 percent of new students), there are comparable groups for students who enter in kindergarten through grade 5. The 6th, 7th, and 8th grades account for, respectively, only 8, 5, and 4 percent of all CCSF admittees, and higher grades account for even tinier percentages. Thus it should be no surprise that the lotteried-in and lotteried-out groups are not comparable for grades of entry like 6 through 12.

In short, we confidently estimate the effect of attending a charter school for students who enter kindergarten through grade 5. We cannot use the lottery-based method with any confidence to estimate the effect of attending a charter school on students who enter in atypical grades, like grades 6 through 12. This is a limitation, because we might be intellectually curious about how charter schools affect the rare student who enters as, say, a 12th grader. However, it is a limitation that is largely irrelevant to policymakers. Most charter school students will, by definition, enter in grades that are typical grades of entry.

Charter Schools and Student Achievement

Because our evaluation is based on data from a randomized assignment, our analytic strategy is relatively simple. In essence, we simply compare the achievement of lotteried-in and lotteried-out applicants through the spring of 2004, or up to four years following their initial application. The results we report are adjusted to reflect the fact that not all lotteried-in students enrolled in charter schools. They therefore represent the effect of actually attending a charter school, not simply of drawing a lottery number low enough to gain admission. To refine the comparison, we account for the slight differences in the observable traits, including earlier test scores, that emerged by chance between lotteried-in and lotteried-out applicants. This refinement makes little difference in practice because randomization ensured that the groups were comparable.

We find that students in charter schools outperformed a comparable group of lotteried-out students who remained in regular Chicago public schools by 5 to 6 percentile points in math and about 5 percentile points in reading.

We find that students in charter schools outperformed a comparable group of lotteried-out students who remained in regular Chicago public schools by 5 to 6 percentile points in math and about 5 percentile points in reading. (See Figure 2.) These are the key results of our analysis, and they translate into gains of 2.5 to 3 points for each year spent in the charter schools. The results are based on students who enter charter schools in kindergarten through grade 5, the grades of entry for which we can confidently estimate effects. To put the gains in perspective, it may help to know that 5 to 6 percentile points is just under half of the gap between the average disadvantaged,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

minority student in Chicago public schools and the average middle-income, nonminority student in a suburban district. If the students continued to make such gains for each year they spent in charter schools (a big "if"), then the gap between the charter school students and their suburban counterparts would close entirely after about five years of school. Right now, such projections are necessarily very speculative, but they help to give some sense of the magnitude of the charter-school effect.

The Virtues of Randomized Experiments

While the small number of students entering charter schools in midstream grades, like grades 6 through 12, precludes our estimating effects for them, the resulting focus is on the whole desirable. After a charter school is established, the vast majority of its students enter in the early elementary grades; for the most part, places in higher grades become available only when a student leaves.

In contrast, the rareness of late-grade entry poses serious problems for value-added analyses of charter schools, such as that by Robert Bifulco and Helen Ladd, who study North Carolina charter schools (see "Results from the Tar Heel State," p. 60). Such studies, which compare the annual gains made by students in charter schools with the gains made by the same student while attending a traditional public school, draw only on the experiences of students who were tested for at least two years in the regular public schools before attending a charter school. Because they rely on state tests that are administered for the first time in the 3rd grade, almost all the students included entered charter schools in 5th grade or later. These students are most likely unrepresentative; after all, they are engaging in behavior that is rare.

The fact that 5th-grade entrants are rare is not accidental; it results from parents' hesitancy to move children between schools. Logic would suggest that students who are moved midstream are more likely to be struggling socially or academically, and any such differences would cause results based on their experience to be misleading. It is dangerous to apply such results to more typical charter-school students, and it is wrong to portray them as representative in the absence of independent evidence that they are.

Our own data set can provide some indication of the magnitude of the problem. Fifth-grade entrants comprise only 13 percent of CCSF's total admittees and only about 6 percent of the admittees in our analysis, which excludes applicants from private schools and does not include charter schools that are in their first year of operation. If we limit the analysis to the 5th-grade applicants for whom we can compute value-added estimates, the number of student-year observations included immediately falls by about 85 percent. If we use standard value-added methods to estimate the effects of attending a charter school for these students, the results do not match well with those of our lottery-based analysis. In short, studies that use value-added methods to evaluate charter schools are at best misleading. The students included are too atypical for the results to be interpreted in a straightforward way.

Conclusion

We have analyzed established charter schools in Chicago that are overseen by the Chicago Charter School Foundation. Our results demonstrate that, among students who enter in a typical grade, attending a charter school improves reading and math scores by an amount that is both statistically and substantively significant. We believe that these results can safely be extrapolated to similar schools that serve similar students. In particular, the results are most useful for understanding the effects of charter schools run by education-management organizations on student populations that comprise largely low-income and racial/ethnic minorities. We cannot confidently extrapolate the results to very different charter schools, students from very different backgrounds, or students who enter in atypical grades. Our results should be helpful for many policymakers who are concerned about urban students like those we study. However, we do not claim that the results are helpful for all policymakers.

Research on charter schools, like the schools themselves, is fairly new. We are not aware of any other studies that use lotteries to isolate the effects of attending a charter school. Standard value-added analyses, which are often used to evaluate charter schools, rely entirely on an unusual group of students who switch from regular public schools to charter schools late in their elementary-school careers. Our analysis confirms that estimates of the effects of attending a charter school that rely on this peculiar group of students differ dramatically from estimates that are representative of students who apply to charter schools.

These differences probably stem from the tendency of parents to move children in the middle of elementary school only if they are already struggling. Thus we doubt that value-added analysis will ever produce results that have relevance beyond the peculiar set of students on which they depend. Evaluations of charter schools should rely on students who are typical of charter school applicants, not on students who are atypical. Randomization provides us with estimates that are inherently better than those based on value-added analysis.

Caroline M. Hoxby is professor of economics, Harvard University. Jonah E. Rockoff is assistant professor of economics and finance, Columbia Business School.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We must go beyond our traditional system of teacher education..."

-Frederick M. Hess, *Tear Down This Wall*
Progressive Policy Institute, 2001

The American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence is "tearing down walls"—opening new pathways for knowledgeable professionals to change careers, become teachers, and advance student learning.

Individuals who earn the American Board's respected and efficient *Passport to Teaching* certification must demonstrate high levels of subject area knowledge and research-based professional teaching knowledge.

With verified competency and unsurpassed motivation, American Board teachers are making a difference in schools today.

Work with us to expand our success and gain recognition for *Passport to Teaching* in your area. To join our network of advocates, visit www.abcte.org/advocates. If you are interested in becoming a teacher—or know someone who is—call 1-877-669-2228.

Visit us online at www.abcte.org

AMERICANBOARD
for Certification *of* Teacher Excellence

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Results from the Tar Heel State

Older Students Did Better When in Regular Public Schools

In this paper, we use an extensive student-level data set to evaluate the impact of charter schools in North Carolina on the math and reading performance of students in grades 4 through 8. We address three main questions: Do students attending charter schools in these grades make larger or smaller gains in achievement than they would have made in traditional public schools? If so, what accounts for the quality differences between charter schools and traditional public schools? And, finally, do students who attend traditional public schools subject to competition from charter schools make larger achievement gains than they would have in the absence of charter schools?

Controlled Choice

Legislation authorizing charter schools in North Carolina was passed in 1996, and the first charter schools opened in the fall of 1997. By capping the number of charter schools statewide, limiting the annual growth in the number of schools per district, and providing for input from the local district before approval of charter applications, North Carolina has exercised more control over the establishment of charter schools than some states. Nevertheless, the North Carolina legislation is quite permissive in that it allows any individual or group to apply for a charter and does not require local district approval of a charter application. North Carolina charters operate as independent nonprofit corporations, act as their own employers, are automatically exempted from several regulations, receive operating funding at the same level as traditional public schools, and are subject to the same state testing requirements as traditional public schools. Thus North Carolina's program includes many of the elements recommended by charter school advocates. However, the state does not provide charter schools any additional funding for facilities.

The number of charter schools in North Carolina grew steadily after 1997. By 2001–02 there were 93 charter schools and more than 18,000 charter school students; charter schools made up 4 percent of all schools and enrolled 1.4 percent of the state's 1.3 million students. Charters can be revoked for a number of reasons, including poor student performance and financial mismanagement. Overall, about 12 percent of the charter schools that have been opened are now closed, but in no case was the decision to revoke a charter or to close due primarily to low student performance. Growth in the number of charter schools has slowed markedly since 2001–02, primarily because the state law caps the number of charter schools at one hundred. Even so, only seven states had more charter schools than North Carolina as of 2002 and of those, only five had a greater concentration of charter schools: Arizona, Florida, Wisconsin, Michigan, and California. The 93 charter schools operating in 2001–02 were spread across 46 of North Carolina's 100 counties.

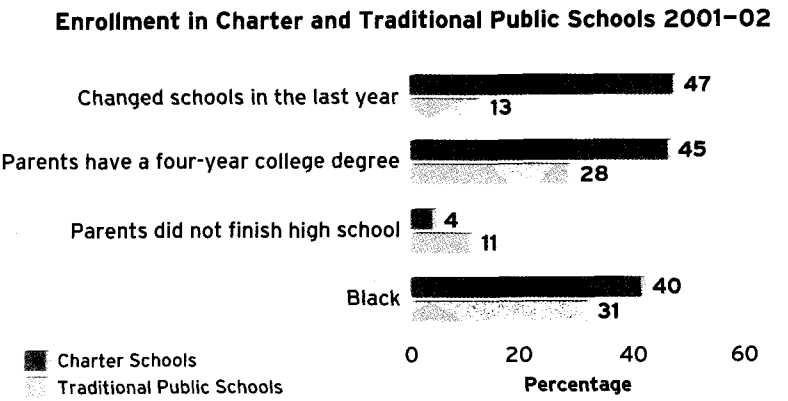
Our analysis of these schools is based on data from the North Carolina Education Research Data Center, a collaborative effort involving the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Duke University, and the University of North Carolina. The database contains individual-level information on test scores and background characteristics for all students in grades 3 through 8 in the state's public schools, charter and traditional. We use these data to measure the gains in student achievement made by individual students each year between 4th and 8th grade.

BY ROBERT BIFULCO AND HELEN F. LADD

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Who Attends Charters? (Figure 1)

Charter schools are more likely to enroll black students than are traditional public schools. At the same time, the parents of charter school students are more educated than their public school counterparts.



SOURCE: Authors' presentation of data from North Carolina Education Research Data Center

The mixture of 3rd through 8th graders in North Carolina charter schools in 2001–02 differed from that in traditional public schools (see Figure 1). Compared with traditional public schools, charter schools in North Carolina enrolled a larger percentage of black students and lower percentages of Hispanic and white students. Roughly 40 percent of charter school students in grades 3–8 were black, compared with 31 percent in traditional public schools. At the same time, charter schools served a higher percentage of students whose parents are college educated and a lower percentage of students whose parents are high school dropouts.

Despite the higher average education level of their parents, charter school students exhibit lower levels of performance on end-of-grade tests in both reading and math. The gap between students in charter schools and students in traditional public schools is .12 standard deviations in reading and .22 standard deviations in math. Our analysis attempts to determine if any of this difference in performance can be attributed to the charter schools themselves.

Measuring Charter School Effectiveness

The primary challenge in determining how effective charter schools are in raising student achievement arises from the fact that charter school students are self-selected. Because they have chosen to attend a charter school, they are likely to differ in unobserved ways from otherwise similar students who choose to remain in traditional public schools.

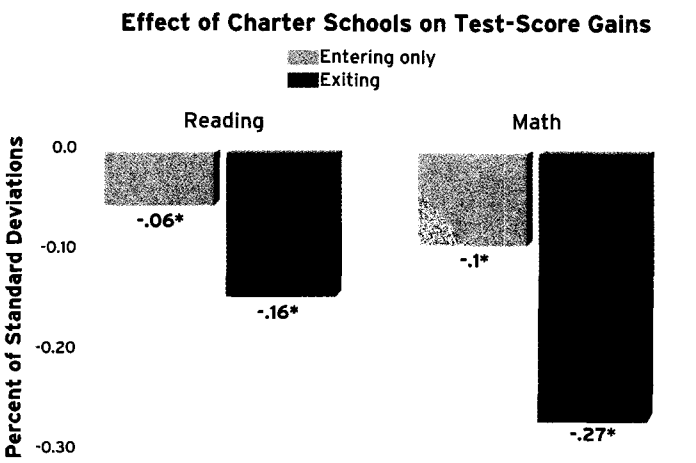
In principle, the best way to determine how effectively charter schools raise student achievement is to conduct a randomized experiment. Studies adopting this approach take the students interested in attending a charter school, use a lottery to assign them randomly either to the charter school or to a control group of students who would not have access to that school, and then compare the achievement of the students given access to the charter school with that of the students in the control group. This approach, which is used by Caroline Hoxby and Jonah Rockoff in their study of charter schools in Chicago (see p. 52), is useful for determining if a particular charter school or the education program it offered is effective. However, the results of such experimental studies apply only to the programs offered by and the type of students who apply to the specific oversubscribed charter schools evaluated.

When studying an entire system of charter schools, including some that are not oversubscribed, it is not possible to conduct a true experiment. Thus we use a method that in effect compares the test-score gains of individual students in charter schools with the test-score gains made by the same students when they were in traditional public schools. This approach provides powerful protection against bias from self-selection. However, this protection comes at a cost. In the end, our analysis of charter school effectiveness is based on the experiences of only those students for whom we observe annual gains (whether positive or negative) in test scores at least once in a charter school and at least once in a traditional public school. Because we have information on students only in grades 3 through 8, they must have attended a traditional public school at least once between 4th and 8th grade to be included in our

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The North Carolina Charter Lag (Figure 2)

The test-score gains of students who attended North Carolina charter schools lagged behind those of their counterparts in traditional public schools. This difference was more pronounced for students who transferred back from a charter to a traditional public school ("exiting") than it was for those students who stayed in charter schools ("entering").



* Significant at the 0.05 level.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on data from the North Carolina Education Research Data Center

analysis. If such students are not representative of all students who attend charter schools, our analysis may not provide an accurate measure of the average effect of attending a charter school in these grades. As we show below, however, this limitation does not affect our basic conclusions.

The Effect of Attending a Charter School in North Carolina

Our data set includes information on five cohorts of students: those in 3rd grade in 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000, some 495,000 students altogether. Each cohort contains all the students in 3rd grade in North Carolina public schools, including charter schools, during the specified year. Each student has a unique identifier that is consistent over time, which allows us to follow students from 3rd grade through the last year that they remain in North Carolina public schools, the year they complete 8th grade, or the 2001–02 school year, whichever comes first. To compare test-score gains of students from different grades, we first standardize their raw scores separately by grade and year to have a mean of zero and standard deviation of one and measure the change in each student's standardized score from one year to the next. A gain score of zero indicates that a student has kept pace with the average student in the state, while a student with a gain score of 0.25 standard deviations will have improved his or her performance by enough to exceed roughly 10 percent of the state's students.

We first compare the average gains made by all students in charter schools with the gains made by students in traditional public schools, taking into account differences in gender, ethnicity, and the highest level of education completed by their parents. Because moving between schools is known to have a negative impact on student achievement, we also control for whether the student changed schools in the current year and whether that change was structural (for instance, the student moved to a junior high school from its feeder elementary school).

The results of this initial analysis reveal that students in charter schools, on average, make annual gains that are 0.06 standard deviations less in reading and 0.08 standard deviations less in math than students in traditional public schools with similar observable characteristics. Because the students in charter schools are self-selected, however, this difference could be attributable to one or more unmeasured characteristics of the students rather than to the fact that they are in a charter school.

As explained above, we address the problem of self-selection by comparing the gains made by students the years they were in charter schools with the gains made by the same students the years they were in traditional public schools. Of the 8,745 students in our data set who attended a charter school for at least one year, 5,746 also attended a traditional public school at least once between 4th and 8th grade. The results of our analysis of these "switchers," which continues to take into account the difficulties associated with moving between schools, again indicate that students make smaller gains while enrolled in charter schools, by nearly 0.10 standard deviations in reading and 0.16 standard deviations in math. This pattern provides strong evidence that the smaller gains made by these charter school students are indeed due to the quality of the schools they attend rather than to any unobserved differences between charter school students and students in traditional public schools.

The difference in the rate of achievement growth between students enrolled in charter schools and students in traditional public schools is substantial. It is substantially larger than differences between the growth rates for children of high-school dropouts and the children of parents with graduate degrees as well as those between blacks and whites, differences that are the focus of considerable concern. For example, our analysis indicates that the annual gains made by children of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

high-school dropouts lag behind those of children of parents with graduate degrees by 0.03 standard deviations in reading and 0.06 standard deviations in math. The negative effects of attending a charter school, on average, for the students in grades 4 through 8 included in our analysis, are roughly three times this large.

How Representative Are the NC Charter Students?

Analyses of the effects of attending a charter school may be misleading if the students included are not representative of all students who actually attend charter schools. It is therefore important to consider how the 5,746 "switchers" included in our final analysis, those who attended both a charter school and a traditional public school in North Carolina between grades 4 and 8, differ from the state's full population of 8,745 charter school students in these grades. Although our data confirm that the two groups are quite similar demographically, two differences are worth noting.

The first is that students who leave charter schools before 8th grade to return to public schools are overrepresented in our analysis. Thirty-seven percent of the students for whom we observe test-score gains at least once in both sectors attended a traditional public school after they were in a charter school, while the same is true of only 30 percent of all students in charter schools. That is, charter school "exiters" are overrepresented in our analysis by nearly 25 percent. If these exiters left charter schools because they were not doing well there academically, our estimate of the effect of attending a charter school may be more negative than the true effect for all charter school students.

Looking separately at the effect of attending a charter school for exiters reveals that the effect of attending a charter school is, in fact, considerably more negative than for students who were observed first in a traditional public school and remained in a charter school throughout the study period (see Figure 2). We therefore calculated weighted averages of the effects for students observed only entering charter schools and the effects for students observed exiting charters, with the weights equal to the proportion of each group in the total population of charter school students. The corrected estimates are -0.09 standard deviations in reading and –0.15 standard deviations in math. In short, the overrepresentation of exiters matters, but it accounts for only a small fraction of the estimated negative effect of charter schools.

A second key difference between switchers and the larger group of students attending charter schools in any year is that students who entered charter schools in the younger grades are underrepresented. Although our data do not allow us to address this issue directly while still accounting for the self-selection of students into charter schools, simple comparisons indicate that students who entered charter schools in the later grades made smaller gains in math (but not reading) than students who entered earlier. Given the underrepresentation of students who enter during early grades, this difference suggests that the average effects of attending a charter school across all grades, 4 through 8, may be less negative than indicated by our final analysis, at least for math. Even so, we see no reason to suspect that the true average effects are not negative.

Given the underrepresentation of students who enter during early grades, this difference suggests that the average effects of attending a charter school across all grades, 4 through 8, may be less negative in math than indicated by our final analysis.

ALL PHOTOS / COMSTOCK

New Schools with New Students

One potential explanation for these findings is that many of North Carolina's charter schools were in their first years of operation and thus were grappling with the challenges of starting a new school. We therefore reran our analysis, allowing for the effect of attending a charter school to vary with the number of years the charter school had been open. The results confirm that the negative effects of attending a charter school are considerably greater for students in newly opened charter schools than for students in charter schools that are more established. After again correcting for the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

overrepresentation of exiters, the effects of attending a newly opened charter school were -0.17 standard deviations in reading and -0.28 standard deviations in math, or almost twice the average effect reported above for all charter schools in the state. However, it is important to note that the complications associated with being a new school cannot fully explain the poor average performance of charter schools: the negative effects of attending a charter school in North Carolina remain greater than .10 standard deviations in both subjects, even for schools that have been operating for five years (see Figure 3a and 3b).

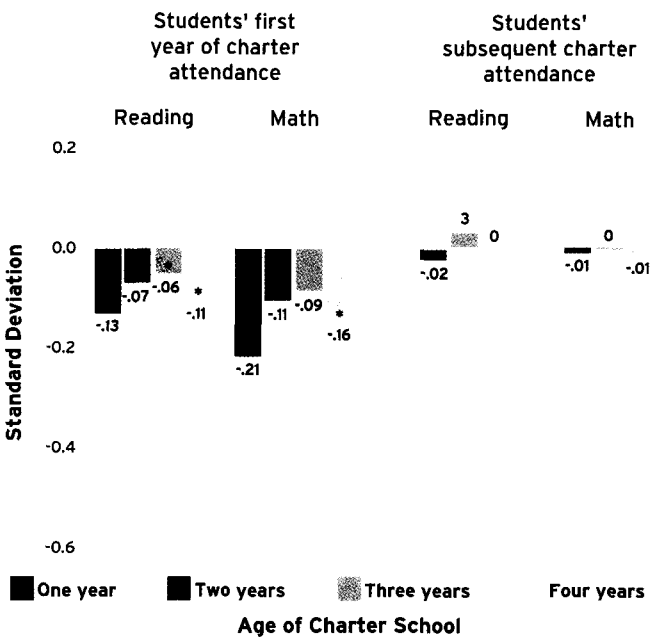
We next considered whether the effects of attending a charter school also varied with the length of time the specific student had been enrolled. The results proved informative. First, the negative average effects of attending a charter school are driven largely, but not entirely, by students making unusually small gains during their first year in a charter. This is true regardless of how long the school has been operating. For some reason, transferring into a charter school seems to have a much more negative effect on achievement than transferring into a traditional public school. Second, students who choose to remain in charter schools do not continue to make smaller gains than students in traditional public schools after their initial year in a charter school. This is reassuring, in that it justifies the decision of many parents to keep their children in charter schools once they are there; the disruptive effects of moving between schools would make the return to a traditional public school counterproductive. However, it is also clear that the initial achievement hit these students take is not offset by gains in subsequent years, so that even this group, which is harmed least by attending a charter school, still has lower levels of achievement as a result of attending a charter school. Finally, we see that students who ultimately leave charter schools two or more years after they enter continue to make smaller gains relative to those they would have made in a traditional public school even after their first year in a charter school.

One reason North Carolina's charter schools might have difficulty providing effective education programs is high rates of student turnover. Rapidly changing student populations make student grouping and scheduling more challenging, intake of new students can distract administrators from other tasks, and assessing and helping new students can place extra demands on teachers' time. On average, the percentage of students in a school in grades 4 through 8 that made a nonstructural transfer in the previous year is far higher in charter schools than in traditional public schools.

Those First-Year Blues (Figure 3a)

The apparent negative impact of attending a charter school is largely attributable to the adverse first year. Students who remained in charters for more than one year kept pace with students in traditional public schools.

Effect of Charter Attendance on Test-Score Gains of Students Who Were Observed Entering School by Age of School



* Significant at the 0.05 level.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on data from the North Carolina Education Research Data Center

While only 14 percent of students in traditional public schools made nonstructural transfers, the same is true of more than one-quarter of students in fifth-year charter schools and of an even larger share of students in newer charter schools. Taking into account the higher rates of student turnover in charter schools reduces the magnitude of the estimated negative effect of charter schools by 29 percent in reading and by 30 percent in math. Thus high rates of student turnover may account for as much as one-third of the negative impact charter schools have on student performance. Even so, the coefficients on the charter school variable remain statistically significant, suggesting that other factors also play a role in the poor performance of charter schools.

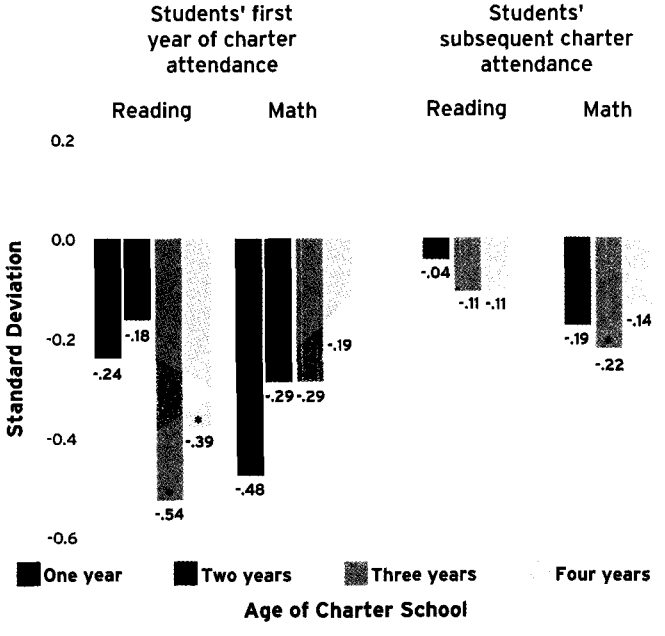
Effects of Competition on Traditional Public Schools

Charter schools have the potential to have broader effects on student achievement if traditional public schools respond to the threat of losing students to charter schools by improving the quality of their own education programs. Although the number of charter schools in North Carolina and the nation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Figure 3b)

Effect of Charter Schools on Test-Score Gains of Students Who Were Observed Exiting School by Age of School



* Significant at the 0.05 level.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on data from the North Carolina Education Research Data Center

has grown rapidly over the past decade, they still represent only a fraction of the total number of public schools and are likely to remain so for a number of years. Still, if North Carolina's traditional public schools improved in response to their presence, the apparently negative effects of charter schools on the achievement of students who attend them could be offset by more positive statewide effects.

To estimate the effects of charter schools on students in traditional public schools, we use information on each school's distance from the nearest charter school to develop indicators of whether or not the traditional school faces competition from charter schools. How close does a charter school have to be located to a traditional public school to provide meaningful competition? For 90 percent of the 6,576 transfers in our database, the distance between the charter school where the student enrolled and the traditional public school the student attended the previous year is less than ten miles. Our data also indicate that schools within 2.5 miles of a charter school lose a higher percentage of students to charter schools, and hence appear to face more competition, on average, than do schools 2.5 to 5 miles from the nearest charter, and that the threat of losing students to a charter school depends also on the number of charter schools within a given radius of the school. Our analysis of competitive effects therefore investigates whether the effect of charter schools on traditional public schools varies with the number of nearby charter schools as well as with the distance to the nearest charter.

First, however, we must take into account the fact that the location of charter schools is not randomly determined. If charter schools were primarily established in response to dissatisfaction with traditional public schools, they would tend to be located in areas with low-quality traditional public schools where students would tend to make below-average test-score gains. Alternatively, charter schools might be more likely to attract students in areas where parents tend to be more motivated and more informed. In those areas, gains in student test

The negative effects of attending a charter school are driven largely by students making unusually small gains during their first year in a charter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scores might be higher than in other areas, even in the absence of charter schools.

To address the problem of nonrandom location, we essentially measure the effect of charter school competition on test-score gains by comparing the gains made by students in each traditional public school before the establishment of a nearby charter with the gains those same students made in that school after the arrival of nearby charter schools. Our results suggest that traditional public schools did not respond to competition from charter schools by becoming more effective, at least as measured by the learning gains made by individual students in the years immediately following establishment of charter schools. Not only are none of the estimated effects statistically different from zero, but many point in the opposite of the expected direction. We emphasize, however, that the intensity of competition in North Carolina is not very great. Even schools located close to several charter schools are unlikely to lose a substantial percentage of students. Thus our finding should not be interpreted as a general statement about the potential of charter school competition to influence traditional public schools.

Traditional public schools did not respond to competition from charter schools by becoming more effective; however, the intensity of competition in North Carolina is not very great.

Conclusions

We set out in this research to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of charter schools on the math and reading performance of North Carolina students in grades 4 through 8. Our results can only be described as discouraging for charter school supporters. Students in these grades make considerably smaller achievement gains in charter schools than they would have in traditional public schools, and the negative effects are not limited to schools in their first year of operation. Nor are the negative effects of attending a charter school substantially offset by positive effects of charter schools on traditional public schools, a finding that may reflect the fact that North Carolina charter schools provide only a limited amount of competition.

However, for students who choose to remain in charter schools, the negative effects of attending a charter school are largely limited to their first year of attending a charter school. It is also important to note that our findings apply only to students who either entered a charter school after grade 4 or exited a charter school before grade 8. Our data do not allow us to comment on the experience of students who entered charter schools before grade 4 and attended them through the end of middle school.

We also provide evidence that high student turnover rates may account for about 30 percent of the difference between test-score gains made in charter schools and what we would expect the same students to make in traditional public schools. This finding suggests that student turnover can be an unintended negative side effect of school choice. Because school-choice plans lower the costs to families of switching schools, it is plausible that such plans will increase the movement of students across schools and thereby increase student turnover rates, to the detriment of all students.

However, charter schools in North Carolina exhibit negative effects on student achievement even after controlling for student turnover rates. Further investigation to determine whether the remaining negative effects are due to peer influence, resource inadequacies, or poor management would be useful. Whatever the reason for the low performance, the public interest is not well served when charter schools are ineffective in raising student achievement.

Robert Bifulco is assistant professor of public policy, University of Connecticut. Helen F. Ladd is professor of public policy studies and economics, Duke University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pseudo-Science and a Sound Basic Education

Voodoo Statistics in New York

Checked:

"The New York Adequacy Study: Determining the Cost of Providing All Children in New York an Adequate Education," American Institutes for Research and Management Analysis and Planning *(March 2004).*

"Resource Adequacy Study for the New York State Commission on Education Reform," Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Service *(March 2004).*

"Report and Recommendations of the Judicial Referees," in Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc., et al., Plaintiffs, against The State of New York, et al., Defendants *(November 2004).*

Checked by Eric A. Hanushek

Most people who read the headlines last February were stunned to learn that New York City schools were being short-changed by $5.6 billion per year, or more than $5,000 per student. The 43 percent court-ordered budget increase, from around $13 billion in operating expenditures to something approaching $19 billion (not including some $9 billion over five years for building improvements), is the largest school finance "adequacy" judgment ever awarded.

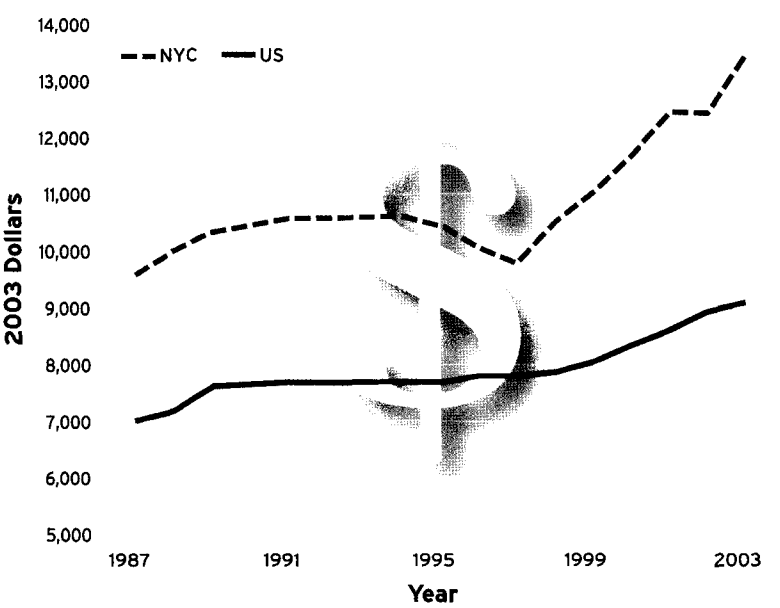
Of course, most people do not have a good grasp on either the economics or the performance of New York City schools. If they did, they would be even more stunned by the declared shortfall.

Figure 1 shows the recent history of spending in New York City, now nearly $13,000 per student per year, which is more than 50 percent above the national average and pulling away.

Infinity and Beyond (Figure 1)

Per-pupil expenditures have skyrocketed in New York City since the late 1990s, both in absolute terms and relative to the rest of the country.

Per-Pupil Expenditures in New York City Compared with U.S. Average, Selected Years, 1987-2003



SOURCE: New York State Education Department; National Center for Education Statistics

The city does, by any standard, face huge education problems. Indeed, despite a drastic restructuring of the school bureaucracy, implemented by Mayor Michael Bloomberg beginning in 2002 (see *Forum*, p. 11), and despite the heavy infusions of cash shown described in Figure 1, Gotham's academic outcomes remain poor. On the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests, 46 percent of the city's students scored "below basic" in mathematics, and 38 percent were below that low threshold in reading (compared with 33 and 28 percent for the nation, respectively). On the state exams that can be tracked over time, New York City has had mixed results—improvement in some areas but declines elsewhere.

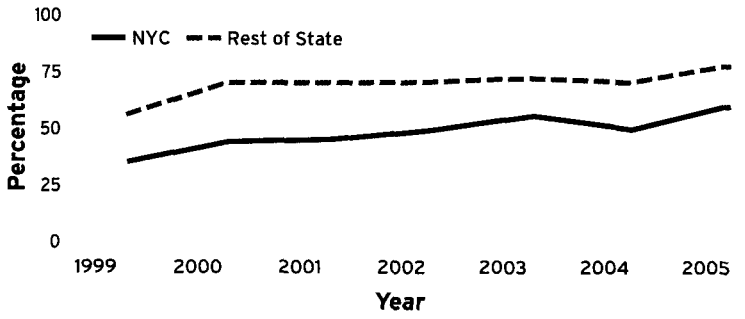
But the discrepancy between years of budget increases and years of mediocre

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

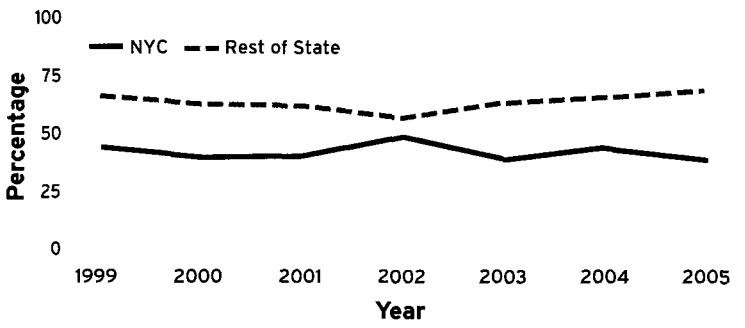
A Reading Frenzy? (Figures 2a and 2b)

Though widely celebrated as an indication of real improvement, the reading test scores for New York City 4th graders trailed those in the rest of the state and have only slightly closed the gap in recent years. For 8th graders, the gap has widened.

a) Fourth-Grade Students Passing the New York State Reading Test



b) Eighth-Grade Students Passing the New York State Reading Test



SOURCE: New York State Education Department

academic outcomes did not deter New York State Supreme Court Judge Leland DeGrasse from deciding that the problem could be solved by an annual addition of $5.6 billion.

The very process of budget determination implicit in such judicial appropriations gives the first indication that something is fundamentally haywire. Ordinarily, courts have nothing to do with expenditures. That is a matter for the political branches, not the courts, to decide—a constitutional arrangement that led that great New Yorker, Alexander Hamilton, to declare the judiciary the weakest branch. In New York, as in all other states, the normal appropriations process begins with the governor's creating the budget recommendations for education and other state services. The legislature, subject to gubernatorial veto, appropriates the funds. But such constitutional proprieties were set aside when Judge DeGrasse—with no previous education expertise and no relevant staff support and without considering the impact on other areas of expenditure—intervened to establish the level of education appropriations for New York City. Suddenly the weakest branch had declared itself the boss.

Given the fundamental constitutional conflict involved, this judicial decision will probably be in and out of the courts and legislature for some time. To get some hint of the future, one may look no farther than neighboring New Jersey, where the courts have retained control over the financing of several city school districts for decades.

Nonetheless, it is informative to investigate what is behind the DeGrasse appropriations, because New York is only the leading edge of a national movement. In more than two-thirds of the states, teacher unions, school districts, and other interested parties have filed similar lawsuits that seek judgments resembling the stunning result handed down in New York.

The DeGrasse judgment is the result of a decade-long political and legal struggle (described by *New York Daily News* reporter Joe Williams in this journal earlier this year: "Legal Cash Machine," *Education Next*, Summer 2005). Several groups, led by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE), a nonprofit legal advocacy organization, filed suit in 1993 claiming that New York State was depriving New York City public school students of their constitutional rights to a "sound basic education," a standard that had been prescribed in 1982 by the state's highest court (in New York, the Court of Appeals). Despite its name, the lead plaintiff in the 1993 complaint, CFE, did not argue that the state's financing arrangements were inequitable, but that the funds given to New York City were not "adequate" for a sound basic education. From his Manhattan courtroom, Judge DeGrasse sided with the plaintiffs. The decision was ultimately upheld by the Court of Appeals, which remanded the case to DeGrasse to ensure that the Constitution was served; hence his appropriations figure.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But the interesting question, ignored in all the righteous hoopla over the court decision, is: Where did Judge DeGrasse get that $5.6 billion figure? Why not $10 billion? Or just $1 billion? How much does a sound basic education cost?

The Inexact Science of Costing Out

The paternity of the $5.6 billion figure is easily traced to the plaintiffs in the case, whose expertise was treated as authoritative, despite their obvious vested interest in the outcome. The Campaign for Fiscal Equity had commissioned a costing-out study by a consortium of two consulting firms, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and Management Analysis and Planning, Inc. (MAP). Both firms claimed to have the analytical capacity to determine objectively the funding schools need to perform adequately. The consortium, known as AIR/MAP, made the extraordinary claim in its November 2002 proposal that its study would answer the question, "What does it actually cost to provide the resources that each school needs to allow its students to meet the achievement levels specified in the Regents Learning Standards?"

The following year AIR/MAP submitted its final costing-out analysis to its client, the plaintiff, who then submitted the document to the court by way of the panel of three referees appointed by Judge DeGrasse to assist in fashioning an appropriate remedy. These referees were a Fordham Law School dean and two retired New York judges, none with any particular expertise in school finance. After an intensive and expensive period (the three referees submitted combined bills in excess of $350,000 for their part-time work over the course of four months), they issued a 57-page report accepting the essential elements of the AIR/MAP document that CFE had submitted to the court. The referees recommended that funding of New York City schools be ramped up an additional $5.6 billion a year within four years; that new studies be undertaken every four years to find out how much, if any, additional funding would be required; that $9.2 billion be spent for capital projects spread over the following five years; and that another study be conducted after five years to see if additional spending was required.

The range of estimates underscores the arbitrary nature of any number the court would order the legislature to spend.

Both Judge DeGrasse and the mainstream New York City media covering the story treated the referees' report as authoritative. Little attention was given to the other studies reviewed by the referees that recommended quite different levels of expenditure. One might have thought the referees would give at least equal consideration to the report submitted by the New York State Commission on Education Reform appointed by Governor George Pataki. Known as the Zarb Commission, after its chairman, Frank G. Zarb, a former chairman of NASDAQ, the commission estimated that the city needed $1.9 billion to provide an adequate education. Meanwhile, the City of New York, eager to get as much state money as possible, proposed additional spending of $5.4 billion, an amount that resembled the AIR/MAP recommendation. It added the caveat that none of this funding should come from the city. Not to be left out, the New York State Board of Regents calculated its own figure, $3.8 billion. Even Standard & Poor's jumped in, with an independent study that included 16 different estimates for the resource gap, ranging from as high as $7.3 billion to as low as $1.9 billion, depending on achievement targets, regional cost adjustments, and cost effectiveness of districts. The Zarb Commission, in fact, used the lowest of S&P's estimates as the basis for its own recommendation.

This range of estimates underscores the arbitrary nature of any number the court would order the legislature to spend. Even the plaintiff's own consultant, AIR/MAP, admitted that its "'costing out' methods are not based on an exact science." Far from being an exact science, the method they chose, as we shall see, was profoundly subjective, a matter of judgment by and for self-interested parties.

Aligning Professional Judgment and Self-Interest

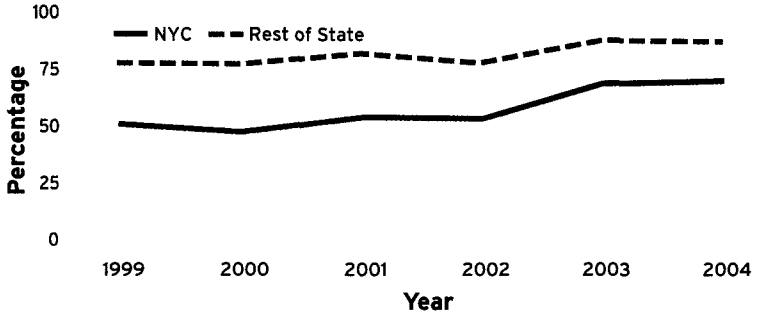
The AIR/MAP study relied on the "professional judgment" method in its costing-out analysis. The consultants brought together multiple panels of school personnel and asked them to design a program that would ensure that all New York City students could get a sound basic education and determine the resources needed to deliver the program. But these program designers, 56 in all, were also service providers whose pay, working conditions, and other funds were directly dependent on the resources put into the system. Such a procedure is akin to asking Martha Stewart how much you should pay for her to decorate her own house. When someone else is to pay,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

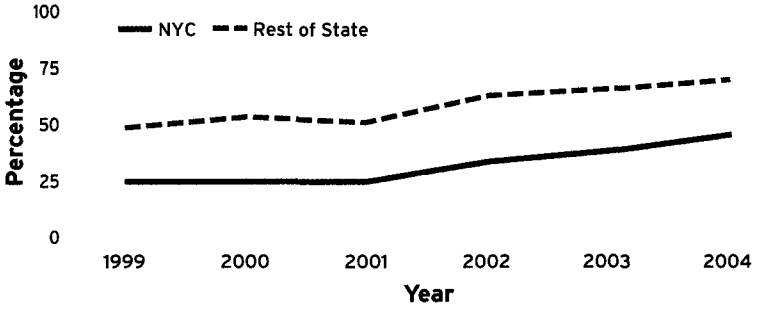
Go With the Flow (Figures 3a and 3b)

From 1999 to 2004, the math scores of New York City 4th and 8th graders continued to trail those of students in the rest of the state.

a) Fourth-Grade Students Passing the State's Math Test



b) Eighth-Grade Students Passing the State's Math Test



SOURCE: New York State Education Department

and Martha is to enjoy, one can only expect the sky to be the limit.

Admittedly, not all 56 panelists worked within the New York City school system. But all except one, a retired employee, were currently working somewhere within the New York State school system. Since the panelists were asked to cost out programs statewide (presumably in anticipation that any financing changes would spill over to districts outside New York City), the conflict of interest could hardly be more direct, unless the panelists had been paid for their labors in proportion to the amount they recommended.

These arguments are not against professional judgment per se, but against its misuse in this case. There is a big difference between asking professional educators to make education decisions and resource allocations within the constraints of a fixed budget and asking them to determine what that budget should be. The former endeavor is what they traditionally do, exactly where the professional judgment of an administrator might be helpful, just as it would be useful to have Martha Stewart's decorating opinion. But that opinion is solicited *after* a fixed budget has been set. Asking the professional educators to determine the budget only guarantees solutions that retain the basic organization of the current system, including the existing incentive structure. After all, it is a structure that the participants have accepted and to which they have grown accustomed.

Notably, the AIR/MAP approach did not consider any ways of reconfiguring the education system so as to make it more efficient. Instead, it assumed that existing arrangements were fixed and made their best guess as to how much more money that system might need to get the job done. Not surprisingly, the professionals' recommendations included such nostrums as paying employees (themselves) more and giving them less work to do (reducing class size). The notion that the city's current stable of teachers should be paid more is particularly ironic, given that much of the plaintiffs' evidence at trial was devoted to documenting their shortcomings. Moreover, research has shown that any of these steps would cost a fortune, far beyond any reasonable expectations of achieving adequate performance levels. The professional judgment panels paid such research no attention whatsoever.

Substituting Self-Interested Judgment for Data

The AIR/MAP analytic approach ignores ample evidence from New York indicating the absence of a clear connection between performance and expenditure. Take, for example, the percentage of students in a district who obtain a Regents' diploma, a key measure of education quality in New York. Districts that are higher performing by this indicator actually

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spend, on average, no more than the lower performing districts (after adjustment for differences in family income, special-education placements, and the percentage of students who are of limited English proficiency). Thus the normal operations of districts in the state give no indication that increasing expenditure alone would necessarily enhance student achievement.

Now consider New York City itself. The judicial referees call for a 43 percent increase in spending. Between 1998 and 2003, as Figure 1 shows, expenditures in New York City increased by almost exactly that amount, 44 percent, an increase that surpassed the rate of increase for the state as a whole and for the nation. If money is the answer, this history should help foretell the results of the next infusion. But as Figures 2a through 3b demonstrate, student passing rates in reading and math for New York City students have remained barely above 50 percent—in fact, have worsened in 8th-grade reading. Whatever small gains have occurred, they hardly support the conclusion that spending increases constitute the solution to the city's inadequate schools. Perhaps these numbers led AIR/MAP to qualify their findings so dramatically as to undermine the validity of their study:

> The success of schools also depends on other individuals and institutions to provide the health, intellectual stimulus, and family support on which public school systems can build. Schools cannot and do not perform their role in a vacuum. Furthermore, schools' success depends on effective allocation of resources and implementation of programs in school districts.

If more resources are not sufficient, what is the evidence that they are necessary? Are there reasons to believe that the next 40-plus-percent spending increase will have a greater impact than the last? Or should we expect the next quadrennial costing-out study to call for yet another 40-plus-percent increase in spending to meet the achievement goals?

Program designers, 56 in all, were also service providers whose pay, working conditions, and other funds were directly dependent on the resources put into the system. Such a procedure is akin to asking Martha Stewart how much you should pay for her to decorate her own house.

S&P's Successful Schools Model

The Standard & Poor's study relied on the "successful schools" method, focusing on observed costs for a set of New York districts that obtain good student outcomes. Even after allowing for the cost of educating students with special needs, S&P's analysis showed a wide dispersion across school districts in the spending observed to achieve equivalent outcomes. The lower-spending half of successful districts spent 50 percent less than the higher-spending districts, proving that many good schools do quite well with much less than other schools. Recognizing this, the Zarb Commission went with the average expenditures of the lower-spending half of the successful districts.

The definition of success is particularly relevant to understanding the synthesis of the different approaches, since, as noted, the full S&P analysis considered a variety of possible definitions of "successful schools." The Zarb Commission relied on the set of school districts meeting the Regents' operational definition of an adequate education: 80 percent of their 4th graders passed the math and English exams and passed five of the high-school graduation tests. This definition of the objective of an adequate education was consistent with the court's decision on how to interpret the requirement of a sound basic education.

Curiously, however, AIR/MAP defined a sound basic education quite differently. It determined that a successful school district was one in which all students meet the full Regents Learning Standards, a much higher bar that moved the 80 percent pass rate to 100 percent. That measure was explicitly rejected in the New York Court of Appeals decision, which the referees were being asked to implement.

Meeting more stringent standards should clearly cost more than meeting the lesser standards. Yet the referees, by carefully selecting and modifying components of the S&P study, were pleased that they could extract similar estimates of adequate funding requirements from the various studies. They state, "This relative convergence of costing-out results derived from three different methods—the successful school district method used in the State's costing-out analysis, the professional judgment method used in plaintiffs' costing-out analysis, and the City's detailed planning method—provides comfort that our $5.63 billion costing-out recommendation to the Court is indeed sound."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If the costing-out studies have any validity, the cost of achieving very different outcomes should not be the same.

Why Worry about Efficiency?

The most basic problem is the absence of a scientific method in the application of the costing-out models. The reasonable scientific question is, "What level of funding would be *required* to achieve a given level of student performance?" In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that the methodology used in *any* of the existing costing-out approaches, including the two considered here, is capable of answering that question.

The existing analyses never consider the minimum cost, or efficient level of spending, needed to achieve the desired outcome. Instead, they are fixated on identifying any policies that might lead to an improvement in performance, almost without regard to the magnitude of gains or cost. The focus on minimal required spending is a necessary ingredient, because without this restriction the question of cost is completely arbitrary (and thus beyond science). Actual spending to achieve an outcome can obviously range anywhere from the efficient level to infinity. But none of the available methodologies focuses on the efficient spending required for any given performance level.

Moreover, locking in the current technology (through professional judgment or successful schools) can at best produce marginal changes in outcomes. Overcoming the deficits illustrated in Figures 2a through 3b will require more dramatic improvements.

Consider again the AIR/MAP analysis. There is, first, no demonstration that the schools that employ the panel members are using their funds in a particularly effective manner or that their experiences indicate they have the data to answer the "level of funding" question. Second, there is no way to replicate the wish lists of the specific panels, because they are based solely on personal opinions of the selected panelists and not on any data about school operations.

More important, the specific approach of AIR/MAP for combining the judgments of the separate professional judgment panels led directly to costing out the *maximum*, not minimum, recommended resource use to achieve the Regents Learning Standards. Thus, ignoring whether the choices would conceivably lead to the desired outcomes, the methodology necessarily produced a biased answer, albeit one that suited the interests of the clients.

The referees seemed unconstrained by any of this logic, however. The state, using S&P's estimates, had suggested that it was reasonable to concentrate on the spending patterns of the most efficient of the successful schools, those that did well with lower expenditure, and thus excluded the top half of the spending distribution in its calculations. But when the referees attempted to reconcile the state's recommendation of $1.9 billion with the AIR/MAP estimates of more than five billion dollars, they insisted on adding in all the high-spending districts, even when such districts did not produce better academic outcomes. Thus they forced on S&P an inefficiency standard that, on its face, violates the premise of the successful schools model. After all, the referees reasoned, "there was no evidence whatsoever indicating that the higher spending districts ... were in fact inefficient." In other words, spending more to achieve the same outcomes should not be construed as being inefficient. One might then ask, What would indicate inefficiency?

Perhaps, however, the top-spending districts are using the money for some unmeasured reason. If so, this would only magnify the analytical problem, for if the top-spending districts are not comparable, then their spending level does not indicate what would happen if funds were added to a typical district. It would not reflect the causal effect of added funds on student outcomes, but rather the effects of unknown underlying differences between the districts. But, again, neither AIR/MAP nor the referees made any use of historical data, so no consideration of variations in spending across districts entered their deliberations.

Furthermore, in neither the successful schools nor the professional judgment methodologies is there a sense that the results of the successful districts could be reproduced without instituting a host of reforms (unmentioned by the referees) to ensure that the extra money led to better schools. In fact, the multiplicity of high-spending/low-achievement districts would seem to indicate that money is decidedly not the measure of a good school, that the approach fails on fundamental grounds of science.

To avoid the dead end that both logic and the facts create for costing-out proponents, the referees use a clever bit of language throughout their report. They calculate the amount of annual funding required "to provide all New York City school children the *opportunity* for a sound basic education" (emphasis added). They never say that the spending they propose *will achieve* the desired results. Such a statement, or rather, such an omission, clearly suggests that the referees and Judge DeGrasse are not interested in improving student outcomes as much as they are in equalizing opportunities for inefficiency. Unfortunately, doubling the dosage of an ineffective pill seldom provides an effective cure.

Just Send the Money

The courts, of course, do not condone wasting funds. In fact, court judgments about school finance frequently contain explicit notes cautioning that the funds will lead to improvements only if they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are used effectively. Such tautological statements seldom recognize that New York City (and other states under judgments) have no history of spending funds effectively.

At the same time, the objective is a serious one. The education problems in New York City (and a number of other jurisdictions that face court financing challenges) are real and important. Many people would indeed be willing to put more money into New York City schools (or any poorly performing school for that matter) if they had any reason to believe that students' achievement would improve significantly.

Unfortunately, addressing these problems by simply augmenting the current system, which has virtually nonexistent performance incentives, will not solve the problems. At such a critical juncture, students and taxpayers alike deserve an approach that embraces the best of what we already know about investments in public schooling that work. This is not ensured by any of the legal proceedings to date.

In the end, the big difficulty with the costing-out exercise is that it purports to provide something that cannot currently be provided: a scientific assessment of what spending is needed to bring about dramatic improvements in student performance. By their very nature such studies provide little information about the costs of achieving improvements efficiently. They contain nary a word about changing the reward structure for teachers (other than paying everybody more). They avoid any consideration of accountability systems based on student outcomes. And they lack any appropriate empirical basis.

Asking the courts or, more precisely, outside consultants to provide a scientific answer to the question of how much should be spent on schools is irresponsible. Decisions on how much to spend on education are not scientific questions, and they cannot be answered with methods that effectively rule out all discussion of reforms that might make the school system more efficient.

Even the weak statement from the New York Court of Appeals that new accountability should accompany added funding was met with indifference by the judicial referees, who accepted the thrust of Mayor Bloomberg's testimony when he appeared before them: he is already accountable through the electoral system, so just send the money.

Eric A. Hanushek is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and a member of its Koret Task Force on K–12 Education.

"Highly recommended"
—Library Journal

Ask for *The Common Review* at your favorite library, newsstand, or bookstore. Subscribe today to *The Common Review*, the magazine of the Great Books Foundation ($12 US/$20 Int.), and become part of America's most thoughtful reading community. Visit us online at **www.thecommonreview.org** for selected content and more, or call **1-800-222-5870** to subscribe today.

THE COMMON REVIEW
THE MAGAZINE OF THE GREAT BOOKS FOUNDATION
SUMMER 2005
$4 U.S. $5 CAN.
CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS AT THE CROSSROADS: AN INTERVIEW
Catharine MacKinnon Tears Up the Mommy Track
Indispensable Cynicism
Isaiah Berlin: Before Liberalism Was a Dirty Word
Earl Shorris on Journals of Opinion
The Unbearable Lightness of David Brooks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ILLUSTRATION BY BEN FISHMAN

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Libertarian *liberals*

The revolution—the one foretold in so many platforms, political speeches, and books of the 1960s and early 1970s—didn't really happen. Of course things changed, but not exactly as promised. Though several important social and intellectual trends can be traced to this period, the era still produced more talk than action. A key example was the birth, among some members of the New Left, of a sometimes promising antibureaucratic education movement.

When the Left Was (Sometimes) Right

No radical group was complete without an education arm in those days. The Black Panthers set up weekend classrooms to deprogram children of the racism they imbibed from the public schools during the week, while Bill Ayers, a cofounder of the Weather Underground, worked to set up "alternative schools." The campaign to take on The System and its schools also enjoyed the services of a handful of intellectual spokesmen whose written works outline a case against education bureaucracy that remains brilliant in many small ways, if repulsive in several big ones.

Drawing on earlier criticism of the organization society and its alienating effects, social critic Paul Goodman, already famous for his subversive *Growing Up Absurd* (1960),

BY DAVID SKINNER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

condemned the school system in toto with a slim volume called *Compulsory Mis-education and the Community of Scholars* (1962). Meanwhile, the rebel Catholic priest Ivan Illich took up the cause of Puerto Rican poor people on his way to writing his education manifesto, *Deschooling Society* (1971). Illich would later propose a constitutional amendment summing up his iconoclastic critique of institutional education: "The State shall make no law regarding the establishment of education." But Illich represented the beginning of the end of the Left's interest in a laissez-faire approach to education.

History has not been kind to Illich or Goodman. Diane Ravitch dismissed their work in her history of education reform, *The Troubled Crusade*, as a literary sensation. And the Left hasn't exactly kept the flame burning. Although included in Richard Posner's recent list of six hundred prominent public intellectuals, Illich has lost almost all of the stature that once led the *New York Review of Books*, and even some mainstream publications like the *Saturday Review*, to treat him as a modern-day oracle. In 1989 literary essayist Anatole Broyard, a one-time booster, wrote in the *New York Times* that he'd purged his library of Illich's works. Goodman is best remembered perhaps as an early example of the Left's continuing problem with anti-Americanism, as the progressive thinker Richard Rorty portrayed him in *Achieving Our Country* (1999).

Yet many of Illich's and Goodman's arguments foreshadowed criticism later taken up by school choice advocates on the Right, where until 1996 the Republican party platform still called for abolishing the Department of Education. And today, both the Left and the Right harbor pockets of antibureaucratic resistance and support for arrangements that aspire to take power away from the state, or what the New Left used to call The System.

PHOTO / CORBIS

Marshal McLuhan

Like so many other hipster intellectuals Marshall McLuhan appeared to believe blacks' social disenfranchisement, to some extent, preserved them from The System's dehumanizing encroachments.

A Roman-Collar Rebel

According to the antibureaucratic Left, there was little wrong with American society that wasn't the fault of The System. Illich's *Deschooling Society* put a slightly different twist on this argument, alleging that there was almost nothing wrong with The System that wasn't the fault of the schools. One critic commented that he wasn't against schools, "but once a certain threshold of institutionalization is reached, schools make people more stupid." That threshold, for Illich, came soon.

A Viennese-born Catholic priest and theologian, Illich had some firsthand experience with bureaucracies. In fact, he was being groomed for service in one of the world's oldest, headquartered in the Vatican, when he was transferred to a Hispanic parish in New York City in 1952 for what was supposed to be a training exercise on the way to big things in the church hierarchy. Instead, Illich found himself ministering to the parish poor. He ended up moving to Puerto Rico for his next assignment. And there he quickly clashed with the local bishop, who had forbidden Catholics to vote for a political candidate who advocated state-sponsored birth control.

Illich eventually broke with the church for good in 1969: Rome called him "politically immoral," and he left the priesthood. He continued his intellectual critique of the establishment from his Centro Intercultural de Documentación (CIDOC) in Cuernavaca, Mexico, a school he had founded in 1960 to train missionaries in the language and culture of Latin America. Illich would use CIDOC as an experiment in education and as a center for discussions and debates on important social topics of the day. The center played a critical role in the writing of his famous condemnation of the ills of institutionalized learning.

Illich believed there were two kinds of institutions: bureaucratic or technocratic, and convivial. The first, like highways and universities, were the province of a wealthy elite, car owners and people with the money for an advanced education. These institutions had a self-replicating and increasingly entangling logic. Highways encouraged people and society to normalize their lives and jobs around their cars, resulting in more cars and highways and regulation. Advanced education, similarly, established itself as the linchpin for a whole society by becoming the gatekeeper and primary authority on all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kinds of knowledge, making costly and obscure the kind of information (for instance, basic medical information) that should be available to anyone with an interest in it or a knack for it.

In contrast, convivial institutions, like local roads or the post office, are genuinely public and open to all. Pedestrians, bicycle riders, and joggers can all find room for themselves on Maple Avenue. Likewise, the postal service is available to anyone with change for a stamp. Learning, Illich believed, should take place only through such institutions. Exchanges needed to be set up where a person could find a teacher for what he or she wanted to know. Education cooperatives, where students were matched with teachers, would replace schools, where bureaucrats possessed the authority to define learning for everyone else. And everyone, no matter their age or certification, would be both student and teacher. In Illich's scheme, individuals would start out with a small number of credits to spend on lessons, but to earn more credits they'd have to do some teaching themselves.

PHOTO / GETTY IMAGES

Ivan Illich

"Lyndon Johnson's compensatory education program is the most expensive ever attempted anywhere in education; yet no significant improvement can be detected in the learning of these disadvantaged children."

Even Unions Have Bay Windows

A persuasive kernel of common sense, in many cases, lay hidden inside Illich's wild-eyed notions: that students learn a great deal from their peers; that educated people teach themselves or otherwise discover, outside the classroom, many of their most important lessons; that advanced education indoctrinates individuals, teaching them a kind of professional code and knowledge for work that can be addressed in a frank manner using plain facts and everyday language. Another insight of Illich's was that learning works best when it is driven by the needs and desires of the individual student, not the self-interested claims of the bureaucracy. A large number of today's antibureaucratic conservatives would agree with some or even all of these propositions.

Illich followed his arguments wherever they led, including to qualified support of free-market reforms. He approvingly cites Milton Friedman's work on vouchers, which he calls "a logical way of cutting the budget and, one hopes, of increasing benefits." But vouchers would not, in Illich's view, offer poor children those benefits that truly set middle-class children apart: the conversation of educated people, books in the home, travel. Vouchers that had to be spent on schooling, Illich complained, would play into the hands of "racists, promoters of religious schools, and others whose interests are socially divisive." Above all, Illich wanted "the return of initiative and accountability for learning to the learner or his most immediate tutor."

Illich even took on Lyndon Johnson's new federal education program, Title I, then the new cure for education woes. "It is the most expensive compensatory program ever attempted anywhere in education," he wrote, voicing complaints that sound similar to those made by critics of "adequacy" lawsuits today, "yet no significant improvement can be detected in the learning of these 'disadvantaged' children. Compared with their classmates from middle-income homes, they have fallen further behind. Moreover, in the course of this program, professionals discovered an additional ten million children laboring under economic and educational handicaps. More reasons for claiming more federal funds are now at hand."

The New Left's radical antibureaucratic critique helped make it conventional for establishment liberals to support reforms that promised to address, in Christopher Jencks's words, "the bureaucracy problem." In a 1966 essay for the *Public Interest* on "slum schools," Jencks sounded as if he might have been channeling Goodman as he castigated the absurd logic of school bureaucracy. The system, he wrote, was burdened by "monitoring," "endless forms," and "constant tests and elaborate regulations for students." And its hierarchical system was a self-perpetuating con. "The student tries to dope out what the teacher wants, and gives it to him.... The teachers, in turn, try to figure out what the principal wants.... The principal, in turn, tries to keep the central administration happy (and the administration tries to keep the school board happy)." The result? "Organizational sclerosis."

The case against bureaucracy was already being made by Leftist organizations like Students for a Democratic Society

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(SDS, the vanguard of the New Left), whose 1962 Port Huron Statement is a broad humanist argument against organizational life. Calling for something to be done "to change our circumstances in the school, the workplaces, the bureaucracies, the government" and insisting on man's "unrealized potential for self-cultivation and self-direction," the statement issued a challenge to modern society built on a critique that had begun six years earlier with William Whyte's *The Organization Man*. Even the unions have failed, complained SDS, to promote the progressive agenda, proving themselves vulnerable to the temptations of bourgeois materialism: "Today even the House of Labor has bay windows."

PHOTO / CORBIS

Bill Ayers

Ayers supports smaller schools that would be more sensitive to the strengths and weaknesses of local communities, believing they offer the best prospect for addressing the inequitable distribution of educational resources.

How to Become a Teacher of Retraining

The guiding intellectual light to many of these New Leftists, including Illich himself, was Paul Goodman. Like Illich, with whom he was friendly, Goodman had a soft spot for vouchers, though he too insisted that the definition of educational activity first be widely expanded. "I would suggest," he wrote in *Compulsory Miseducation*, his polemic against universal public education, "that, on the model of the GI-Bill, we experiment, giving the school money directly to the high-school-age adolescents, for any plausible self-chosen education proposals, such as purposeful travel or individual enterprise. This would also, of course, lead to the proliferation of experimental schools." No friend of the teachers unions, Goodman also pushed for more liberal credentialing: "Use appropriate unlicensed adults of the community—the druggist, the storekeeper, the mechanic—as the proper education of the young into the grown-up world."

Like Illich, who was radicalized while helping New York City's poor, Goodman drew on his experience in the city's public schools. He visited and observed schools and classrooms at the behest of the school board to study the system's counterproductive tendencies. Worthwhile pedagogical innovations, he observed, could occur only on a small scale. If an innovation required money, the bureaucrats demanded it be undertaken on a large scale, to make it worth the investment, explained Goodman—and thus undermined any chance of its success. To capture the illogic of bureaucratic attempts to keep pace with reality, Goodman quotes a Department of Labor employee who was dealing with the problem of training people for specific jobs. "We retrain him, but before the course is finished, the job too has vanished. So we begin again. But after the fourth or fifth retraining, he has a job that doesn't vanish: he becomes a Teacher of Retraining."

Hero to Disaffected Youth

In debating education reform, Goodman adopted not the point of view of The System, even less that of society or the nation (in one recurring riff, he savagely criticizes James Conant, Harvard president and education reformer, for even mentioning "national needs" alongside "individual development"), but that of the dropout, The System's rejects. With the popular success of *Growing Up Absurd*, Goodman had become a hero to radicals 30 years his junior. It was among the new generation of university radicals that his call to resist The System found its greatest resonance.

As Goodman took up the cause of troubled youth, the gripes of the beatnik, the delinquent, and the dropout became his own gripes. That there were young people, especially young men, who dropped out of school to become full-time delinquents fatally undermined The System's moral credibility and political legitimacy for Goodman. As he wrote in *Growing Up Absurd*: "The problem is not to get [delinquent youths] to belong to society, for they belong a priori by being the next generation. The burden of proof and performance is quite the other way."

Goodman argued, like many of today's antibureaucrats, that the noneducation burdens placed on schools made it harder to accomplish their primary purpose: education. He complained of increasing class sizes, which were the result of compulsory universal education, while arguing that real teaching could take place only on a small scale and not in situations where a teacher's first responsibility was crowd control. But Goodman didn't stop there: "In the organizational plan," meaning modern bureaucratic society, he believed schools acted as both a babysitting service and "an arm of the police, providing cops and concentration camps," paid for with public funds.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was as if the Left had, for the first time, discovered that the state played an important role in the socialization of the nation's children. This revelation, combined with the rebellion against the modern bureaucratic way of life, led logically to a critique of the public schools as unnatural, soul deadening, curiosity killing, and productive primarily of "square," hollowed-out yes-men. "It is in the schools and from the mass media," wrote Goodman, "that the mass of our citizens in all classes learn that life is inevitably routine, depersonalized, venally graded."

PHOTO / GETTY IMAGES

Paul Goodman

Some Hard Realities

Goodman's and Illich's thoughts about racial equality were tempered by their distrust of the bureaucracy. Both men avoided the question of civil rights for the obvious reason that the aims of the civil rights movement, to guarantee blacks an equal share of what The System had to offer, were inconsistent with the goal of undermining The System. In fact, like many other hipster intellectuals, Marshall McLuhan for instance, Illich and Goodman appeared to believe blacks' social disenfranchisement, to some extent, preserved them from The System's dehumanizing encroachments. Like much of the New Left, the antibureaucrats were more enthralled by the Black Power movement than by the nonviolent, explicitly Christian, civil rights movement.

The ideas that made these intellectuals quite radical and, not coincidentally, exciting, also minimized the likelihood that their utopian visions would become reality. In *The Greening of America* (1970), Charles Reich, then a Yale professor who "found himself" in the hippie culture of his students, was so confident that the institutions Illich and Goodman complained about needed replacing that he treated their decline as inevitable.

"What is the machinery we rely upon to turn our wishes into realities?" asked Reich, a onetime Supreme Court clerk, in the opening of *Greening*. "Could it be that the American crisis results from a structure that is obsolete? All the other machinery we use becomes obsolete in a short time. A social institution, which is, after all, only another type of machinery, is not necessarily immune from the same laws of obsolescence."

"On the model of the GI-Bill, we experiment, giving the school money directly to the high-school-age adolescents, for any plausible self-chosen education proposals."

In retrospect, the antagonism of Illich and Goodman to commonplace public institutions seems subtle and discriminating next to Reich's account in which the public and the private, the governmental and the corporate, have all blended seamlessly to deprive human beings of their personal dignity. "Beginning with school, if not before, an individual is systematically stripped of his imagination, his creativity, his heritage, his dreams, and his personal uniqueness in order to style him into a productive unit for a mass technological society."

And Then It Was Gone

The movement's hostility to mainstream, "bourgeois" values and the institutions of American society and government never endeared it to more conservative, older generations. Nor did it impress the politicians and parents, who began again, in the 1970s, when standardized test scores were falling, to emphasize the basics in their calls for education reform. The whole Vietnam era, in which whiz-kid organization men like Robert McNamara seemed to represent all that was wrong with the world, began to wind down as public debate focused on how the United States would ultimately withdraw from Southeast Asia.

If the 1960s were a period in which a surprising number of intelligent people looked forward to the demolition of mainstream institutions like the school system, then the 1970s proved to be a time of organization rebuilding. Novel ideas like deschooling and open classrooms slowly faded from the scene, while union rolls and political clout soared. "By the mid-1970s," wrote Diane Ravitch in *The Troubled Crusade*, "both the AFT and the NEA had become major powers, not only in their school districts but in state legislatures and in the nation." The election of Jimmy Carter resulted in the creation of the Department of Education in 1979. The System was thriving.

Still, the promise of education as a lever for social change encouraged many Leftists to become teachers and administrators, in essence, bureaucrats. Bill Ayers, for instance, went from Cleveland alternative schools to the Days of Rage in 1968 Chicago to the bombing of the Capitol to professor of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. (Schools of education are among the only places today where one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

might encounter people who read Illich and Goodman.) Ayers supports smaller schools that would be more sensitive to the strengths and weaknesses of local communities, believing they offer the best prospect for addressing "the inequitable distribution of educational resources" and "the capacity of a range of self-interested bureaucracies to work against the common good."

Another radical who took up education as part of his commitment to the cause of social justice was Howard Fuller, who directs the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University. In Fuller's hands the antibureaucratic rhetoric has been fine-tuned. No longer is The System attacked as a system. Rather, like other antibureaucrats on the Left, Fuller faults the bureaucracy for preserving the social and education disadvantages of poor and minority students. Thus does he eloquently recast the antibureaucratic case as an extension of the civil rights movement, in which Illich and Goodman had stood on the sidelines.

"Did we sit down at a lunch counter at Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina, February 1, 1960, to arrive at another lunch counter today where we are welcome but we can't read the menu?" So said Fuller, who is also the founder of the Black Alliance for Educational Options, at a 2001 BAEO conference. A supporter of vouchers and charter schools, Fuller is no more a friend of the unions than were Paul Goodman or any of the other 1960s antibureaucratic liberals. "Vouchers," Fuller said a few years back, "represent a fundamental change in the way public schools are governed and financed, and the people who stand to lose power aren't ever going to say, 'Oh, fine.'"

But it is not merely among graying radicals that the ideas of the antibureaucratic Left live on. In addition to being visible in the policy briefs and arguments of the antibureaucratic Right, the ideas of Illich and Goodman are being rediscovered on the Left by a younger generation of educators and education scholars. Not surprisingly, many antibureaucratic concepts come to them through the filter of multiculturalism and postmodernism. In any case, their concern for social justice has led them to question whether the bureaucracy's agenda is consistent with the needs of students.

PHOTO / CORBIS

Charles Reich

"Beginning with school, if not before, an individual is systematically stripped of his imagination, his creativity, his heritage, his dreams, and his personal uniqueness in order to style him into a productive unit for a mass technological society."

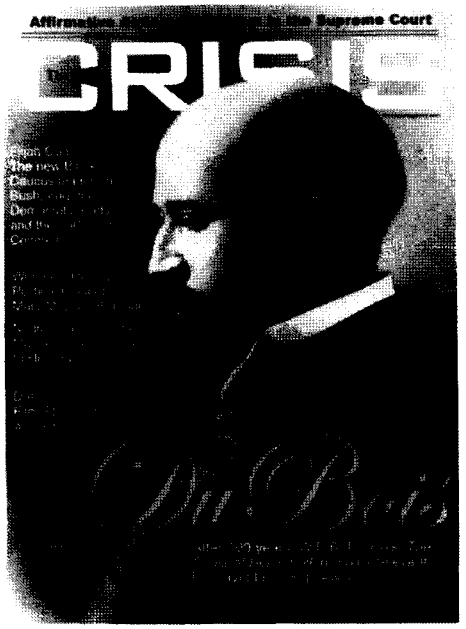
In an essay titled "School Choice through a Foucauldian Lens," published last year, Stacy Smith, a professor of education at Bates College, seized on the ideas of Michel Foucault to dispute the notion that supporting charter schools means supporting market-based education reforms. Describing her own perspective on the charter school debate, Smith writes, "I consider myself a member of the Left in relation to public education because I am concerned with ends of social justice such as equality and fairness; I am also concerned that institutions of public education be governed democratically and that they prepare young people for democratic public life."

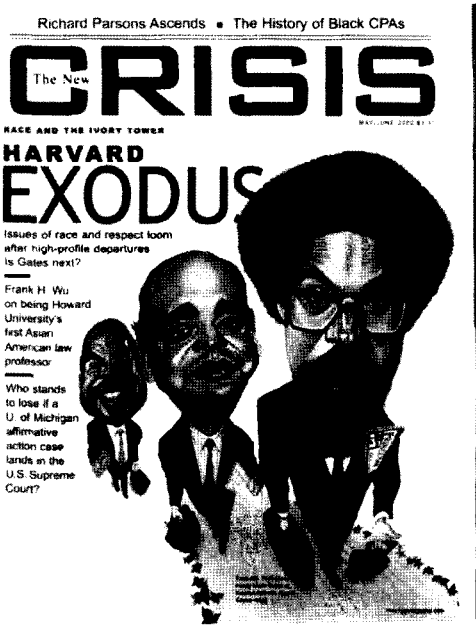
Smith's essay was published last year in *The Emancipatory Promise of Charter Schools: Toward a Progressive Politics of School Choice*. The editors of this volume, Eric Rofes and Lisa M. Stulberg, junior professors at Humboldt State University and New York University respectively, are "two progressive scholars" who "intend for this volume to serve as a challenge to many of [their] senior colleagues." They align themselves with "a longstanding practice among the education Left of faulting bureaucratic organization of public education" for supporting "social inequalities." At the same time, they fault fellow education Leftists for "opposing innovative efforts to transform the organization of public education and the governance of schooling."

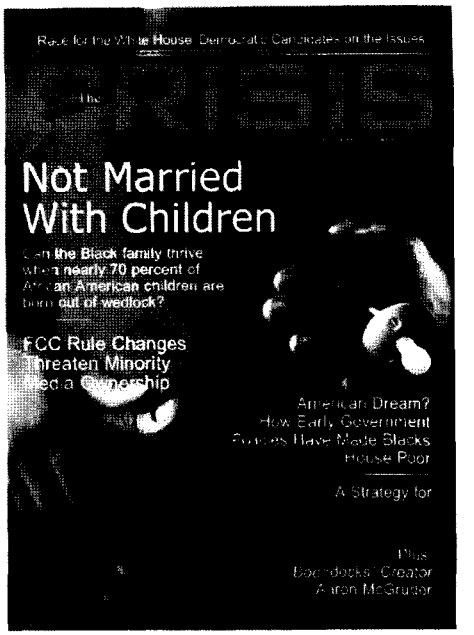
The language may have changed, but once again antibureaucratic liberalism is placing the education goal of raising the life prospects of students ahead of the interests of an education system that is assumed to be healthy as long as it is growing in size and responsibility. At its best, the antibureaucratic Left was brave enough to exalt individual promise at the expense of the bureaucracy. And the new generation is hoping that the school-choice movement will advance this same goal. Next thing you know, these liberals will be reading Milton Friedman.

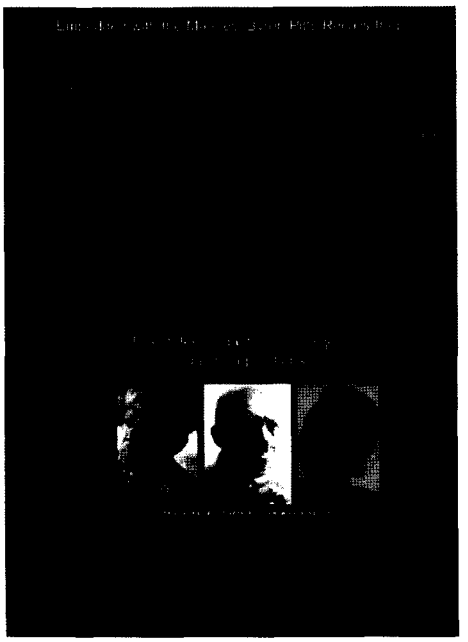
David Skinner is an assistant managing editor at the Weekly Standard *and the editor of* Doublethink *magazine.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED




Richard Parsons Ascends • The History of Black CPAs
The New
CRISIS
RACE AND THE IVORY TOWER
HARVARD
EXODUS
Issues of race and respect loom after high-profile departures
Is Gates next?
Frank H. Wu on being Howard University's first Asian American law professor
Who stands to lose if a U. of Michigan affirmative action case lands in the U.S. Supreme Court?

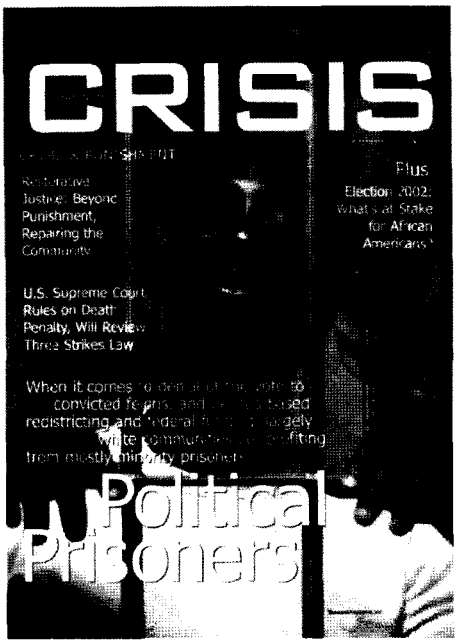

Race for the White House: Democratic Candidates on the Issues
CRISIS
Not Married With Children
FCC Rule Changes Threaten Minority Media Ownership
American Dream? How Early Government Policies Have Made Blacks House Poor
A Strategy for
Plus
Boondocks' Creator Aaron McGruder



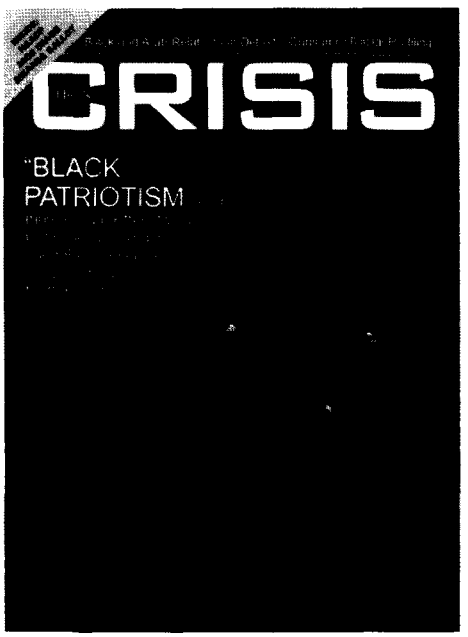
Who knows your heritage? Who knows the issues that count? Who speaks to YOU?

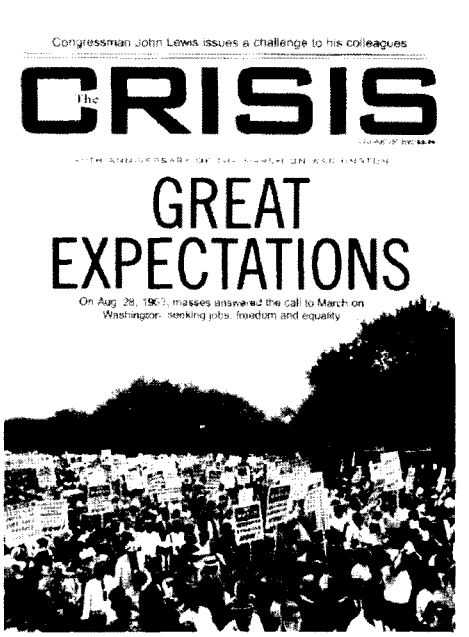
The CRISIS

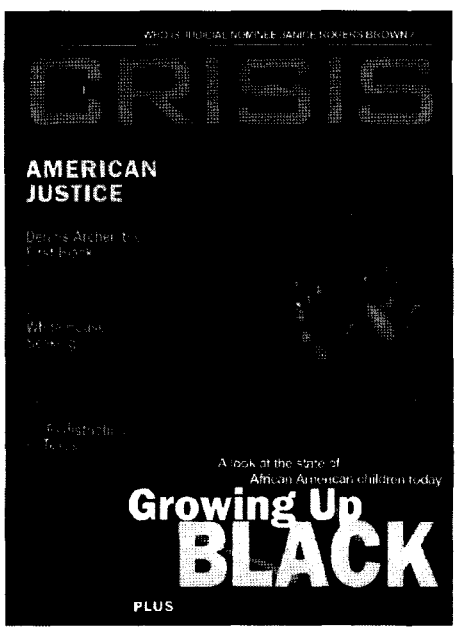
Get your subscription today!
Call 410.580.5138
or order online at
www.thecrisismagazine.com


CRISIS
Plus
Election 2002: What's at Stake for African Americans?
Restorative Justice: Beyond Punishment, Repairing the Community
U.S. Supreme Court Rules on Death Penalty, Will Review Three Strikes Law
Political Prisoners

Find The CRISIS at:
Borders • Barnes and Noble • Hastings Entertainment • College Bookstores • Delta Shuttle




Congressman John Lewis issues a challenge to his colleagues
The CRISIS
GREAT EXPECTATIONS
On Aug. 28, 1963, masses answered the call to March on Washington, seeking jobs, freedom and equality



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

God

Another Four-Letter Word?

Does God Belong in Public Schools?

By Kent Greenawalt

Princeton University Press, 2005, $29.95; 261 pages.

Between Memory and Vision: The Case for Faith-Based Schooling

By Steven C. Vryhof
Foreword by Charles Glenn

William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004, $22.00; 181 pages.

Reviewed by Nathan Glazer

These are two very different books on the role of religion in schooling. Kent Greenawalt, university professor at the Columbia University School of Law, former deputy solicitor general of the United States, a distinguished constitutional lawyer, and a prolific author, has written a dense treatment of the law on religion and the public schools. He does not deal with private or religious schools, though on occasion he does note their existence as possible alternatives for aggrieved parties when this might affect constitutional reasoning on the legitimacy of one or another practice in public schools. For Professor Greenawalt, God definitely does not belong in public schools, certainly not the Christian God, though one detects in his constitutional reasoning a bit more license for other gods.

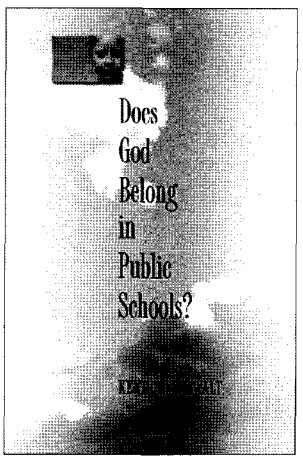
Our other author, Steven Vryhof, is a "speaker, writer, consultant, and adjunct professor of education at Calvin College" and an advocate of faith-based schools. In particular, he supports schools connected to a more orthodox and traditional offshoot of the Reformed Church, three of which he describes in *Between Memory and Vision*. The three schools are in Holland, Michigan; in Bellevue, Washington; and in Hoboken, New Jersey, and he compares them with the nearest public schools. But Vryhof is not really concerned with public schools, except to demonstrate the superiority, in cost and results, of his faith-based establishments. On that score the arguments have been familiar since James Coleman's research on Catholic schools, and they remain sound, in particular on the effect of functioning communities around religious schools.

Vryhof's brief accounts leave the reader wanting to know more about the schools. They seem quite different from the usual image of Christian schools, undoubtedly because of the stronger intellectual tradition of Calvinism. For example, they escape for the most part the dispiriting disputes over evolution and biblical inerrancy. One wonders, though, how graduates of these schools manage in our dominantly secularist colleges and universities, or whether they simply avoid them.

Vryhof does review briefly the constitutional position concerning public support for religious schools, but only to demonstrate its irrationality (yes it's constitutional for books; no for maps; yes for some tests; no for preparation to take tests; and so on).

Our Secular Religions

Reading these two books in sequence, I came across a passage in Charles Glenn's foreword to *Between Memory and Vision* that threw a sharp and revealing light on the subtle and often mind-numbing distinctions elaborated in *Does God Belong in Public Schools?* Glenn writes: "The effect of Supreme



Court decisions over the past forty years was to treat religion as the only forbidden motivation for school choice." Let us extend that comment to read "religion as the only forbidden motivation for any school practice."

One may legitimately have school rules and practices for all sorts of purposes: to improve civic education and public morality, to teach honesty, to prevent disorder, to reduce unwed motherhood and sexually transmitted diseases, to avoid litigation, to encourage empathy for tsunami victims, to strengthen patriotism, and so on. But if the motivation in any way reflects religious belief or commitment, the practice, perhaps otherwise acceptable, falls under constitutional suspicion. An odd limitation in the most religious country in the Western world, where almost everyone believes in God, and greater numbers engage in weekly religious observances than anywhere else.

We have been so educated by the sequence of Supreme Court decisions on religion and schools that began in the late 1940s that most of us would not be astonished at how odd this is. But in studying Greenawalt's detailed expositions and analyses, we may perhaps still be open to some surprise. For example, consider the case of Christian parents protesting "secular humanism" in school readers. Their charge was that the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

texts were in fact teaching religion, such as Secular Humanism and Satanism. Greenawalt tells us that a decision by teachers to use one series of readers rather than another in response to parents' protests "would be uncontroversial [constitutionally] if the parents' reasons had nothing to do with religion. But suppose the minority parents object to the [controversial] series on religious grounds. I believe educators are justified in finding acceptable common ground [with the parents], so long as their judgments are not self-consciously based on their own religious views." And if they are based unconsciously on religious views?

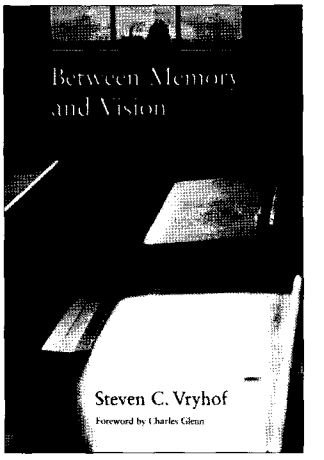
We are in a tangle on religion in the public schools. Greenawalt's main concern is to sort out the threads so he can provide guidance to administrators and teachers (and lawyers and judges) on how to stay within the constitutionally determined limits on religion in public schools. He does try to make some place for teaching about religion as against the exaggerated fears of administrators and teachers, but it is a small place. The way he limits what can be done may not reassure school people that they can stay on the right side of the Constitution in doing so.

The Highest Court Chips at the Wall of Separation

The First Amendment does provide that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or the free exercise thereof," but this did not apply to the states (or to public schools as presumed organs of the state) for the first 150 years of the Union. But beginning with the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment after the Civil War, the provisions of the Bill of Rights were interpreted by the Supreme Court over time to apply to the states, too. The first ruling of significance on religion and the schools was in *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing (N.J.) Township*, in 1947. *Everson* posed the question whether states could provide free transportation to students of nonprofit private schools—specifically, parochial schools. The Court ruled 5 to 4 that busing could be provided, and so we are governed.

But the Court also unanimously adopted the language of Justice Hugo Black in the same case: "The clause [no establishment of religion] was intended to erect 'a wall of separation' between church and state." Greenawalt notes, "This approach was dubious from a historical point of view, given that the amendment actually protected existing state establishments at the time from federal interference." The author believes that the overriding issue at the time of *Everson* was Protestant and Jewish (and secularist) opposition to any assistance to the struggling Catholic parochial schools.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, on a wave of anti-Catholic sentiment, many states had passed prohibitions, constitutional and legislative, against funds for nonpublic schools, laws aimed at Catholic parochial schools. One thinks back to Charles Glenn's observation about the "only forbidden motivation" and Greenawalt's point that conscious religious motives would make a teacher's selecting (or not selecting) school textbooks constitutionally suspect. There was religious motivation involved, conscious more than unconscious, in granting public aid to Catholic schools and in denying it. How could it be otherwise in this religious country?



Conceivably, if the originalist justice Antonin Scalia, is joined by others, the whole applecart may be turned over, to return us to pre-*Everson* days, with matters in the hands of the states. But no respectable constitutional authority would contemplate the possibility. Greenawalt wants to effect sensible compromises. No to creation science and intelligent design supplementing or replacing evolution: it is too hard to hide the religious motivation there, whatever the opponents of Darwinism say. Yes to the teaching about religions, though the dangers there boggle the mind. No to personal expressions of belief by teachers because they may influence students, but much depends on age and sophistication. And so we have guidance on many topics, sometimes so subtle one doubts a teacher can really manage it. Choral music? "Courts ... will consider the director's teaching style, including what he says during rehearsals, the site of a concert and its time of year, how selections are placed in a program, whether notes explain the musical significance of works, and the extent to which performance underscores aesthetic elements." Well, let's drop the *St. Matthew Passion*.

Nathan Glazer is professor of education and sociology emeritus, Harvard University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Scream!

Does Children's Literature Have to Be Scary?

Welcome to Lizard Motel: Children, Stories, and the Mystery of Making Things Up

By Barbara Feinberg

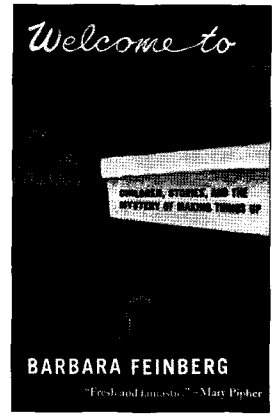
Beacon Press, 2004. $23, 265 pages.

Reviewed by Diane Ravitch

Barbara Feinberg contends that most of the young adult novels that teachers assign to teenagers are dreary, depressing, and didactic. Rather than encouraging impressionable students to read more, these so-called problem novels turn young people into reluctant readers. Furthermore, she holds that the writers' workshops that have spread like kudzu through American elementary schools, promoted by Lucy Calkins of Teachers College, Columbia University, deaden children's creativity.

Both claims are akin to bomb throwing, since these practices are high orthodoxy in the world of professional pedagogy. What is her claim to authority? She is not a card-carrying member of the professoriate, nor does she claim to have a doctorate. She apparently is not worried about winning tenure or finding new friends among professors of pedagogy. She offers up some footnotes to document her reading in the professional literature, but she has no social science data and does not claim to be an expert.

Lacking the medals and ribbons that certify professional expertise, she relies instead on demonstrations of her experience and insight. Her book is a memoir that displays her love of language and children and her understanding of how children think. She writes as a mother, but also as the founder of a creative-writing program for children. She listens to her 12-year-old son and



There is no social science evidence that children need to be frightened by the books they read.

his friends as they discuss the novels that their teachers have told them to read over the summer. The boys don't like them. They seem, in fact, to hate them.

The books that her son, Alex, and his friends are compelled to read are highly regarded by teachers and professors of education. Many come decorated with Newbery medals and endorsements by the American Library Association. They are books known in the field of children's literature as Young Adult (YA) literature. All are highly realistic, written in a confessional tone, usually in the first-person voice of an angry or alienated teenager. The protagonist deals with traumatic experiences: murder, suicide, the death of a parent or friend, incest, sexual abuse, rape, drugs, abortion, kidnapping, abandonment. Friendly or protective adults are virtually nonexistent; the main character's mother, writes Feinberg, is dead, missing, or nonfunctional. Children in these novels almost never play. Often they feel guilty for whatever catastrophe befalls them. The books are uniformly humorless, earnest, and depressing. Their message, to the extent that they have one: the world is a nasty and brutish place, and you can depend only on yourself.

What is missing from YA books, says Feinberg, is any recognition of the role that imagination and fantasy play in children's ways of experiencing life. Instead, the books seem dedicated to shocking children, destroying their fantasies, and giving them a mean dose of reality. One of the children that Feinberg knows said of these books, "They give me a headache in my stomach." It is as though the authors, the publishers, the teachers, and the professors of education share a bizarre consensus that ordinary children need to be shaken out of their complacency, stripped of their innocence, and frightened by the horrors that the world has in store for them at any moment.

No More Trees in Brooklyn

Feinberg divines similar attitudes in the writers' workshops, introduced to her daughter's elementary school by an expert from the Lucy Calkins Writing Project at Teachers College. Under the expert's guidance, seven-year-old Claira's class is soon writing and revising their memoirs. The children are taught to record and revise their experiences; no fantasy is permitted, no fiction, no non-sequiturs. Feinberg recoils at what she describes as profound, if mannerly, thought control, in which imagination and fantasy are ruled out of order. She complains: "This is not a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

natural way that children see. One must have traveled to the end of something to be able to have a satisfying backward perspective. This whole enterprise is something adults have imposed. And why? Why is my generation hell-bent on making our children wake from the dream of their childhoods?"

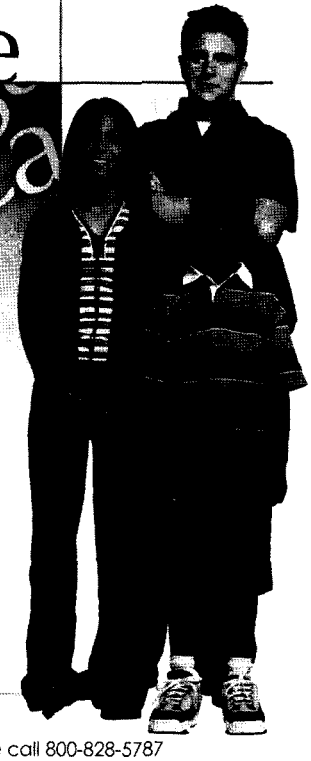
In her own approach to writing and reading, Feinberg is clearly attuned to children's love of making things up, imagining that animals can talk, turning empty boxes into special places for stories that flow from children's daydreams and flights of fancy. As a child, she loved *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. Her son and his friends love the Harry Potter books. These kinds of novels are unacceptable to the academic proponents of YA literature. They are too removed from the horrors of everyday life. The YA crowd prefers books and activities that encourage self-reflection, self-absorption, that is, narcissism.

The advocates of problem novels would no doubt sneer at Feinberg's right to criticize these novels. After all, what are her credentials? A mother and director of a story-writing program for children. But we may well ask, what are their credentials for foisting these novels of adolescent alienation on an entire generation of American children? They believe that children need to read books that upset them, but on what do they base this claim? There is no social science evidence that children need to cry or be frightened by the books they read. Some of the professoriate embrace the bizarre idea of bibliotherapy, believing that children will feel better about themselves if they read about a child with similar problems (for instance, the child of an alcoholic parent should read about the child of an alcoholic parent). However, these claims are based on assumptions, not evidence. In fact, professors of children's literature and classroom teachers are not qualified to act as therapists for children with social and emotional problems. Nor is there any evidence that reading a book is an appropriate treatment for a deep-seated problem.

What Feinberg nicely exposes is that the entire field of children's literature specialists has bought a flawed bill of goods and has sold it to the nation's teachers. They have persuaded themselves that their job is not to promote excellent literature, but to promote depressing problem novels. In doing so, they seem to be turning young people away from literature in droves. Last year the National Endowment for the Arts issued a report called "Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America," which found that the proportion of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 who read literature has declined sharply in the past two decades. Perhaps the professors should ask themselves whether their prescriptions have contributed to this unfortunate trend.

Diane Ravitch is research professor of education at New York University and a member of the Koret Task Force at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

Math Science Technology



Pitsco's Learning Systems affect positive change in Grades K-12. At every grade level, Pitsco's Learning Systems combine innovative methods and practices with age-appropriate curriculum to revolutionize the way students are taught. To learn more about how our Kindergarten to Careers solutions help teachers and students succeed, call us at 800-828-5787.

Delivered

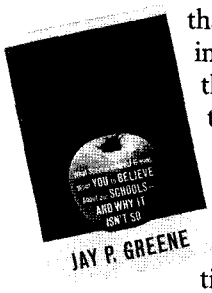
PITSCO
LEADERS IN EDUCATION

For more information, please call 800-828-5787 or visit www.pitsco.com/k12.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOK ALERT

Education Myths: What Special Interest Groups Want You to Believe about Our Schools—And Why It Isn't So. Jay P. Greene, with Greg Forster and Marcus A. Winters. Foreword by James Q. Wilson. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.)

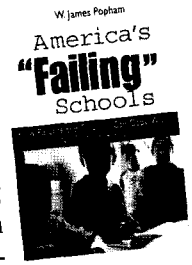


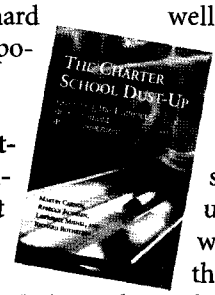
Buried within this book is a powerful if familiar argument: the American education system is worse than we think and won't improve unless we change the incentive structure that drives it. Resource levels are hardly the main problem, say the authors; nor is increasing them a likely solution to our schools' ills. Choice and accountability, which focus on changing the incentives, offer a promising way forward.

What is unique about this concise volume is the authors' systematic debunking of an array of myths—18 in all—that grip our beliefs about how schools work. At the same time they expose the ways that potent interest groups feed the myths and interfere with the authors' reformist vision. The task of reform is, of course, Herculean, and critical readers will remain unpersuaded by one or two of the arguments. But the rigor, clarity, and energy with which the authors press their case make this book one the teacher unions do not want you to read.

America's "Failing" Schools: How Parents and Teachers Can Cope with No Child Left Behind. W. James Popham. (Routledge.)

Popham has written a volume that indulges in flights of hyperbole yet retains a tone of serious scrutiny about NCLB accountability. The author establishes his sincerity early, dismissing complaints that NCLB is underfunded as a "phony" dispute. However, even as he is offering this sensible observation, he is explaining that NCLB, "even with super-abundant funding, will be ruinous for our schools." Popham's criticisms encompass the savvy as well as the silly. He reasonably dings NCLB for the tests the states use, for the crudeness of the adequate yearly progress (AYP) determination, and for the gamesmanship allowed in state AYP timelines. But then he also drags out old tropes about excessive test preparation and the ethical issues posed by such practices. Moreover, despite pointing out the difference between accountability systems and particular assessment instruments, the author frequently appears to attribute the problems of mediocre state tests to NCLB itself. While Popham's preferred solutions may cause some chuckles among accountability proponents—he champions the use of "affective inventories," student work samples, and the like—his analysis constitutes a meaningful critique of the NCLB accountability system and raises hard questions that NCLB proponents need to address.

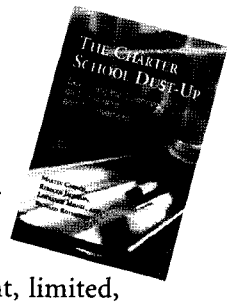




The Charter School Dust-Up: Examining the Evidence on Enrollment and Achievement. Martin Carnoy, Rebecca Jacobsen, Lawrence Mishel, and Richard Rothstein. (Economic Policy Institute and Teachers College Press.)

School Choice: Doing It the Right Way Makes a Difference. The National Working Commission on Choice in K–12 Education, Paul Hill, chair. (The Brookings Institution Press.)

Charter schools are new, diverse, and subject to close scrutiny. That combination necessarily produces research findings that are preliminary, inconsistent, limited, and subject to error. Even the high-quality articles on charters in the research section of this issue of *Education Next* (see pp. 51-66) do not find common ground.



To make sense of all the complexity, there is an ever-growing need for dispassionate summaries that give outsiders a sense of the overall picture while sifting the wheat from the chaff. In this regard, the National Commission report issued by the centrist Brookings Institution remains a good place to begin, despite the fact that it is a bit boring and dated (2003) by the standards of the fast-changing world of school choice.

A more recent contribution, by the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute, is quite otherwise, on the dispassion index, at least. Although charter schools, with all their diversity, have gathered support across the political and education spectrums, from phonics fanatics to Summerhill progressives, the senior authors of this work remain well-entrenched critics of choice. Instead of weighing evidence in the balance, they search for findings they want to believe. For example, the study devotes considerable space to a couple of unrepresentative schools as if they were characteristic of all charters, thereby ignoring the extraordinary diversity of a new world still searching for its identity. The *Dust-Up* authors also use error-ridden information about a child's food stamp eligibility to argue, unconvincingly, that charter schools tend to serve the better-off segment of the minority community.

Above all, an inordinate number of words and pages are devoted to laying out what is depicted as zealotry and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

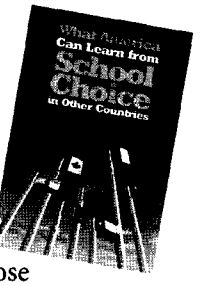
inconsistency among other participants in the debate over school choice, as if that tells one anything about the schools themselves. Although the authors are to be applauded for wanting to hold charter schools accountable to high performance standards, that does not save *Dust-Up* from being best assigned to the dustbin.

The Birth of Head Start: Preschool Education Policies in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. Maris A. Vinovskis. (University of Chicago Press.)

Eminent education historian Maris Vinovskis has crafted a thorough account of the creation and launch of Head Start. The pleasantly brief text, which spans just 155 pages, offers a clear explanation of how anti-poverty policy, national politics, education policy, and changes in views of child development shaped the program in the 1960s. The author concludes that an emerging belief in the malleability of children's intelligence, the "discovery" of poverty in the early 1960s, Lyndon Johnson's energetic education agenda, and the Democratic majority that passed the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 combined to make Head Start possible. Be advised that the volume is a history in the most descriptive sense. Vinovskis provides a careful, blow-by-blow account of the legislative politics and executive decisions that shaped the program rather than an assessment of those decisions. The volume also does not draw links to, or follow implications for, contemporary policy debates; nor does the author explain how early compromises and decisions affected subsequent developments. Finally, the general reader should be forewarned: the narrative ends abruptly in 1969.

What America Can Learn from School Choice in Other Countries. David Salisbury and James Tooley, ed. (Cato Institute.)

Only a little, one might conclude, after reflecting on the essays in this collection. Although James Tooley reveals a lively private education sector in the most unlikely of places (see also Tooley's story "Underground Education," p. 22, this issue), school choice is as uneven and limited in other parts of the world as it is in the United States. The disputation over Chile's voucher experiment is vigorous, but even there the constraints on the education marketplace are substantial. And New Zealand's choice system is so narrowly constrained to government-run operations that the innovation would be totally ignored had folks there not had the same political and linguistic ancestry as those populating the United States. Still, even a modicum of school choice and competition can boost student test scores, especially when combined with a comprehensive examination system for high-school graduates, says Ludger Woessmann, whose systematic, sophisticated analyses of international test-score data best summarize what can be learned from abroad. By itself, this lay-friendly summary of Woessmann's more technical studies makes the book worth the price.

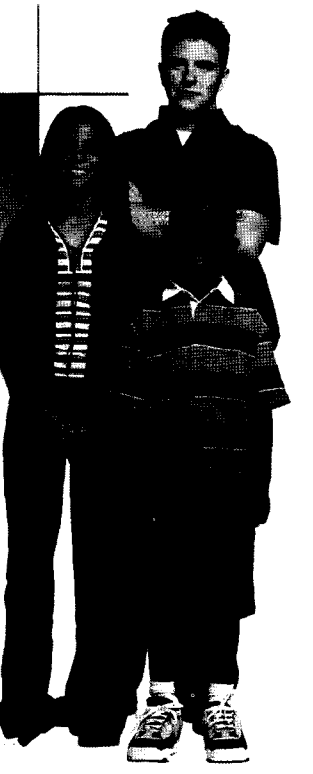


Student Success

Pitsco's Learning Systems have proven successful in schools across the U.S., from rural schools like Augusta, KS, to urban schools in Hartford, CT.

Through innovative methods and practices, Pitsco's age-appropriate curriculum engages and motivates students. Add in its rich core content and hands-on activities, and you'll find a complete curriculum solution that meets high percentages of state and national educational standards.

Delivered



PITSCO
LEADERS IN EDUCATION

For more information, please call 800-828-5787 or visit www.pitsco.com/k12.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Broken on the Court

When the All-Boy Band Visited the All-Girl School

BY IAN EARLE

Two worlds collided today. Fortunately, only a stereotype broke during the impact. I teach at the only all-girl middle school in Oakland, California, Julia Morgan School for Girls. And today, during Monday morning assembly, the girls listened to the only all-boy choir from the only all-boy middle school in Oakland, Pacific Boychoir Academy. Boy bands of yore, from the Beatles to the Backstreet Boys, would be proud of their young progeny and of the raucous show they put on.

PHOTO / GETTY IMAGES

Before school this morning, excited groups of girls had huddled together in our hallowed halls of academia, where emphasis is placed on math and science. Much to the faculty's chagrin, the girls were not philosophizing about Homer or discussing Euclidian geometry. Nor were they even whispering the usual fare: how cute the cast of "Survivor" is or how the Bachelorette picked the wrong hopeful. Instead, despite the faculty's best effort to keep that day's concert a secret, the word was out: boys were on their way.

Give Me an X!

And arrive they did, boys outfitted in matching white shoes, baggy khaki pants, green polo shirts, and oversized, floppy Santa hats. They even brought a foreign-exchange student to add that mysterious bad-boy flavor. His brooding presence helped elevate the girls' excitement to a code-level red, which, in middle-school concert-speak, translates into "extreme risk of screaming once the boys start to sing."

As the bandmaster readied his young charges, an audible "ahhhhhhh" echoed throughout the hall as the smallest member of the band, the requisite cute one, wearing the biggest floppy Santa hat, stepped forward and belted out the opening solo. The boys held all the eyes, ears, and hearts of the girls, as they sang and semi-gyrated their way to middle-school stardom.

After numerous encores, the boys ended their set, and the girls wanted answers: "How old are you and you and you?" and, "Where do you and you and you live?" And straight to the heart of the matter (and straight to the faculty's goal of teaching assertive communication), "Do you or you or you have a girlfriend?"

Lunch period followed the morning assembly, and the student council received the coveted honor to dine with the boys, in a private room. In the cafeteria, on regular lunch duty, I found myself confronted by an angry female mob, which hurled a barrage of accusations and complaints (direct communication at its finest) about school favoritism toward the student council. Fortunately for me, middle-school girls seem to like food on a par with boys, and soon, despite wonderful displays of assertiveness, their lunches got their attention.

Broken on the court were stereotypes so ingrained in our society. Perhaps that is what single-sex education is all about.

Give Me a Free Throw!

After lunch, with time to spare, the cafeteria girls went to the gym and grabbed a basketball. As if on cue, the door opened and out came the boys, to be immediately besieged.

In the ensuing melee, one of the boys, without a thought to the consequences, grabbed the ball, aimed, shot, and watched it drop, with a satisfying swish, through the hoop. With his graceful shot, this poor boy unknowingly set the middle-school girl world on a collision course with his. In the blink of an eye, a nonleague, nonsanctioned, rough-and-tumble, boy-versus-girl basketball game erupted.

The boys found themselves the visiting team on a court filled with home-court advantages. To their credit, they played valiantly and with heart in a last-ditch effort to defend their crumbling world. Alas, the boy band eventually bore the brunt of this middle-school world collision. Broken on the court were stereotypes so ingrained in our society. Perhaps that is what single-sex education is all about.

Ian Earle is a Spanish teacher and athletic director at Julia Morgan.

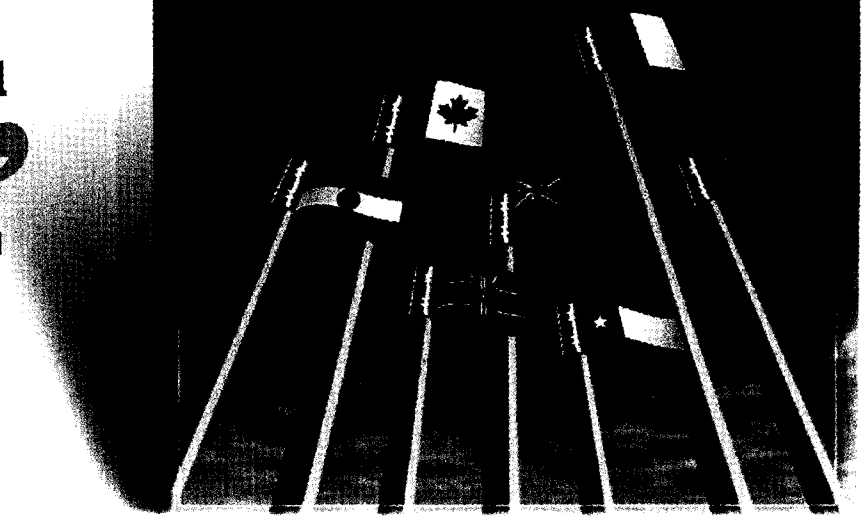
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A comprehensive compendium of educational policy from other countries that ought to inform our own debates as we travel down the road of reform."

—Clint Bolick
President and General Counsel
Alliance for School Choice

Can Learn from

in Other Countries



Parents in many other countries have more freedom of choice in education than Americans do. In Chile, Sweden, and the Netherlands, they can choose private schools without financial penalty. As we expand school choice in the United States, reformers and policymakers should look beyond our borders and learn from the examples of other countries. Critics in America claim that school choice would benefit a minority of students at the expense of the majority, drain funding from public schools, and segregate students into racial or economic groups. Are these claims based on fact or fear?

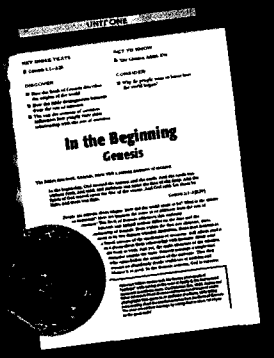
In this collection, scholars from Europe, South America, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States examine other countries' experiences with school choice and draw out critical lessons for America. What school choice policies are most effective? How well do private schools serve the poor? What policies are necessary to promote the widest selection of educational opportunities for the largest number of children? Also, what controls and regulations are most harmful to the development of a competitive education industry? Has school choice in other countries led to a free education market, or has it, at least in some cases, led to increased regulation, regimentation, and uniformity among private and public schools?

The wealth of information and insight contained in this volume will aid policymakers and reformers as they search for the best ways to improve American education.

CATO INSTITUTE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An Educated Person is Familiar with the Bible



New National Report: Students Limited by Lack of Bible Knowledge

A crucial, new national report for educators and parents– funded by the John Templeton Foundation– indicates that America is raising a generation without sufficient knowledge of the world's best-selling book, which limits understanding of literature, art, music, and culture. To access the report, log on to www.bibleliteracy.org.

Academic Study of the Bible is Constitutional and Broadly Endorsed

The Bible & Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide outlines how the Bible can be taught constitutionally as an academic course in public schools. This Guide is endorsed by 20 diverse national advocacy and faith groups, including the NEA, AFT, NSBA, and NASSP. Available in our online Kit for Curriculum Adoption.

The First Bible Literature Textbook of its Kind in Nearly 30 Years

The Bible and American Civilization is the first complete textbook in nearly 30 years for academic study of the Bible in public high schools. Thoroughly reviewed and critically acclaimed, it respects the views of major faith groups, while endorsing none. For sample lessons and helpful information about how to bring it to your school, visit our website.

www.bibleliteracy.org

Download the Bible Literacy Report · Watch Our Archived National Press Conference · Print a Sample Chapter from the Textbook
Learn How to Bring this New Textbook to Your School · Sign Up for Teacher Training · ... and numerous other resources.

Bible Literacy Project

For more information, contact info@bibleliteracy.org or 703-560-5505
Bible Literacy Project, Inc. / 10332 Main Street #353 / Fairfax, VA 22030
http://www.bibleliteracy.org

Bible Literacy Project, Inc. is a non-partisan, non-profit endeavor to encourage and facilitate the academic study of the Bible in public schools.

Online Teacher Support Will Be Available

This pilot-tested textbook will satisfy an elective or required credit in language arts or social studies. Teacher training and lesson materials are being developed. Sign up for notification at www.bibleliteracy.org

EDUCATION next
A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

226 Littauer, North Yard
1875 Cambridge Street
Cambridge, MA 02138-3001
Tel. (617) 495-2491, Fax (617) 496-1507
Website www.educationnext.org

To subscribe or to submit change of address information, call us at 1-800-935-2882; visit us at www.educationnext.org; fax us at (650) 723-8626; email us at hooverpress@hoover.stanford.edu; or write to *Education Next* Subscriptions, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6010

Nonprofit
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 26
Peterborough, NH
03458

10070 XXXX 1
Ron K Unz
No. 371
555 Bryant St
Palo Alto CA 94301-1704

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED